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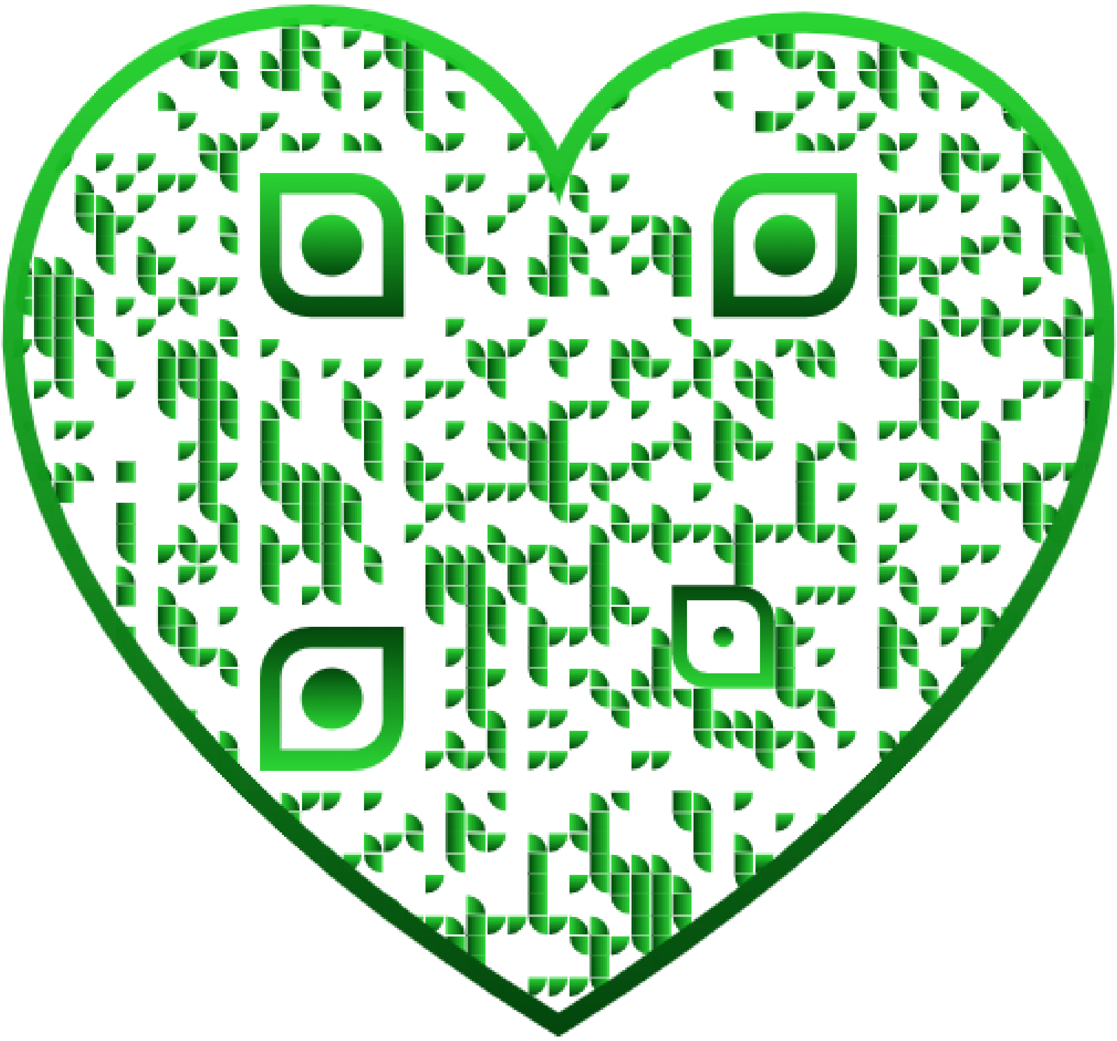

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COMMENT

FIVE DECADES ON, 3 SERIES REMAINS A BENCHMARK

Innovation is the linchpin of the automotive world and often that means shiny all-new brands (such as Cupra, p50) and shiny all-new models. But equally impressive are the safe bets, the cars that quietly innovate while having the long-term heritage and reputation to survive all the new competition.

It's a small pool these days but there can't be many whose mind doesn't go to the 3 Series as example number one. This year, it celebrates turning 50 and Richard Lane marks the occasion (p44) by bringing together one of the most remarkable early models with a modern-day favourite.

Of course, BMW has successfully diversified far beyond its saloons of old. A case in point is the X3 M50 on p56 (less so the XM, as we find out in our road test, p36...). But despite the significantly broader model range, the 3 Series reigns supreme on the sales front, behind only the entry-level 1 Series for UK volume. That's pretty notable in this SUV-laden world.

It hasn't been a perfect 50 years – some 3 Series have been less good than others, such as the 'E90' 2005-2011 model, with its reliability issues – but we stand here in 2025 fundamentally in awe of everything the 3 Series has achieved over five decades. It remains a benchmark driver's car, with all the practicality and comfort you'd ever need thrown in. Bravo, BMW.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk

Meet Skoda's CEO
Klaus Zellmer, who rose through the ranks at Porsche before becoming Skoda's boss, talks to Matt Prior about his vision for the brand.

Hyundai Ioniq 6 N driven
Illya Verpraet puts you in the passenger seat of the N model for the gentleman driver – with 641bhp, 568lb ft and four-wheel drive.

Cars that defined office life
Join us to celebrate a special era of repdom – the '70s, '80s and '90s – when the difference between L and GL was critical.

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"The other day I even replaced the light bulb in the fridge" p20

AUTOCAR
Issue 6697 | Volume 326 | No 10

NEWS

Range Rover Evoque to become EV 4
Radical rethink for Peugeot 208 6
Production-ready Twingo unveiled 8
First details of new electric Bentley 10
Longbow's ultralight EV sports car 12
New Merc E-Class hits the road 14
EV drivers face pay-per-mile tax 17
Debate rages over price of MOTs 18

FIRST DRIVES

Hyundai Ioniq 6 N 26
Honda Super-N 30
Renault Austral E-Tech 33
Kia EV4 34

ROAD TEST

BMW XM 50e 36

FEATURES

50 years of the BMW 3 Series 44
Markus Haupt, Seat-Cupra CEO 50
Monte Carlo e-Rally 52
Car of the Year shortlist reviewed 54

LONG-TERMERS

BMW X3 M50 56
Morgan Super 3 58
Honda HR-V 59

COLUMNS

Jesse Crosse 13
Mark Tisshaw 15
Steve Cropley 19
Matt Prior 20
Damien Smith 21
Testing, testing 43
Why I love... 74

EVERY WEEK

Access 130 years of Autocar 16
Your Views 22
How to subscribe 24
Lost in the archive 65
Road test results 67

USED CARS

Porsche 718 buying guide 60
My car & I 62
Caught in the classifieds 63

52 MONTE CARLO RALLY BUT IN EVs

56 LIVING WITH AN X3 M50: VERDICT

NEWS

GOT A STORY Email our news editor
will.rimell@haymarket.com

RANGE ROVER EVOQUE TO TURN NEXT-GENERATION EV

Top-seller will adopt electric underpinnings as JLR overhauls its line-up

The Range Rover Evoque will be reinvented for its third generation with electric power when it arrives later this decade as the final piece in an overhauled Range Rover line-up.

The new Evoque will be underpinned by JLR's Electrified Modular Architecture (EMA), which will make its debut under the new Range Rover Velar next year.

Like its larger stablemate, the next-gen Evoque is expected to go on sale initially as an EV – a move seen as vital to keeping the nameplate alive well into the next decade and beyond. However, whereas the Velar is set to undergo a radical repositioning, the Evoque will remain as the entry point in the Range Rover line-up, given its popularity with buyers. This is especially true in the UK, where it has been JLR's best-selling model this decade, accounting for 40% of all Range Rover sales.

Evoque has taken 40% of Range Rover's UK sales this decade

An electric Evoque was first mooted in JLR's radical Reimagine strategy in 2021. However, the new EV isn't expected until at least the end of 2027, with deliveries likely to start a year later – a decade after the current model was launched.

Its arrival will crown a busy renewal period for the brand, with the Range Rover Electric due in the first half of 2026, the new Velar soon after and the Range Rover Sport EV at the start of 2027.

POWERTRAIN

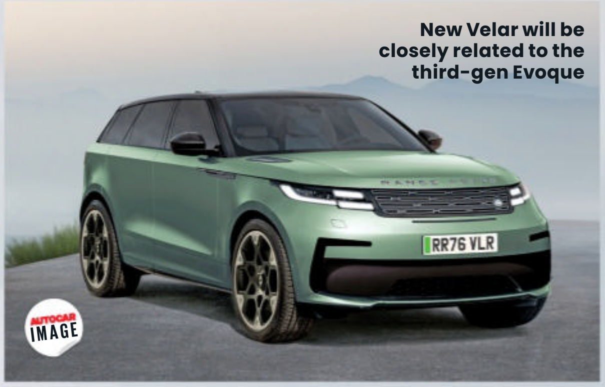
The new Evoque will be totally overhauled underneath compared with the car it replaces.

It will share its new EMA underpinnings with not just the Velar but also the upcoming 'Defender Sport' – and all three will be produced at JLR's Halewood plant on Merseyside, where the current Evoque is built.

The 800V skateboard architecture has been designed with electric power as its primary focus. It will use motors built in-house and batteries from parent company

> **"It will use motors built in-house and batteries from Tata's plant in Somerset"**

RANGE ROVER
R26 EVG
AUTOCAR IMAGE



New Velar will be closely related to the third-gen Evoque

Tata's Agratas battery plant in Somerset, which is scheduled to open in 2027 after work started this summer.

Specific powertrain details for the electric Evoque are still under wraps, but given that rivals such as the new Mercedes-Benz GLA EV are tipped to offer more than 450 miles of range, the new Evoque will need to be competitive with that. Quick charging times will be available courtesy of the EMA's 800V system.

It is possible that the new Evoque and other EMA-based cars could also be fitted with electrified combustion drivetrains to boost appeal, given JLR's decision last year to ramp up plug-in hybrid production amid the global slowdown in interest of pure EVs and a "surprising" rise in PHEV demand. Indeed, JLR has previously said the EMA has been designed to accommodate a range-extender unit, albeit with a small petrol engine.

The UK government's decision earlier this year to extend the sale of all new hybrid cars from 2030 to 2035 is also likely to be factored into any decision.

If that approach is deemed too costly, JLR could instead make the third-gen Evoque EV-only while simultaneously updating the current second-gen model to keep it on sale as the nameplate's combustion option. Today's Evoque is sold with mild-hybrid petrol, mild-hybrid diesel and plug-in hybrid options.

A similar strategy is being employed by Porsche for the upcoming Cayenne EV and by Mercedes for a range of new models including the GLC EQ and E-Class EQ (see page 14).

However, it would mark a strategy change from the inbound Range Rover Electric and Range Rover Sport Electric, which are marketed as a new powertrain variant of the existing generation.

DESIGN

While its underpinnings are set for a radical overhaul, the Evoque's design will probably be more of an evolution of today's. Such an approach would mirror the progression seen when the second-generation model was launched in 2018.

However, the introduction of the skateboard EMA platform could change the model's dimensions, suggested former CEO Thierry Bolloré previously. The Frenchman said EMA would "bring a unique proportion and capabilities to the cars that we're going to manufacture".

That is very much the case for the new Velar, and test mules suggest it will sport a new genre-bending body shape and potentially a third row of seats. However, it remains to be seen what it will mean for the Evoque.

There is no doubt that the EMA will increase the cabin space provided by the new Evoque, though, thanks to the platform's flat floor design. This is likely to translate into more rear passenger space and slightly more room in the boot, which currently has 591 litres of capacity – already among the best in its class.

The interior is expected to continue to feature upmarket materials and adopt a minimalist, tech-centric layout. The EMA's 800V architecture will mean driver assistance and cloud connectivity advancements will also be possible, in line with what is already offered by Audi, BMW and Mercedes rivals.

WILL RIMELL

RANGE ROVER'S ELECTRIC BLITZ

Range Rover Electric 2026

SPY SHOT

Range Rover Velar Mk2 2026

SPY SHOT

Range Rover Sport Electric 2027

Range Rover Evoque Mk3 2027

OFFICIAL PICTURES

NEW 208 PREVIEWED AS STEER-BY-WIRE CONCEPT

Polygon unveiled as window onto Peugeot's next-gen electric supermini

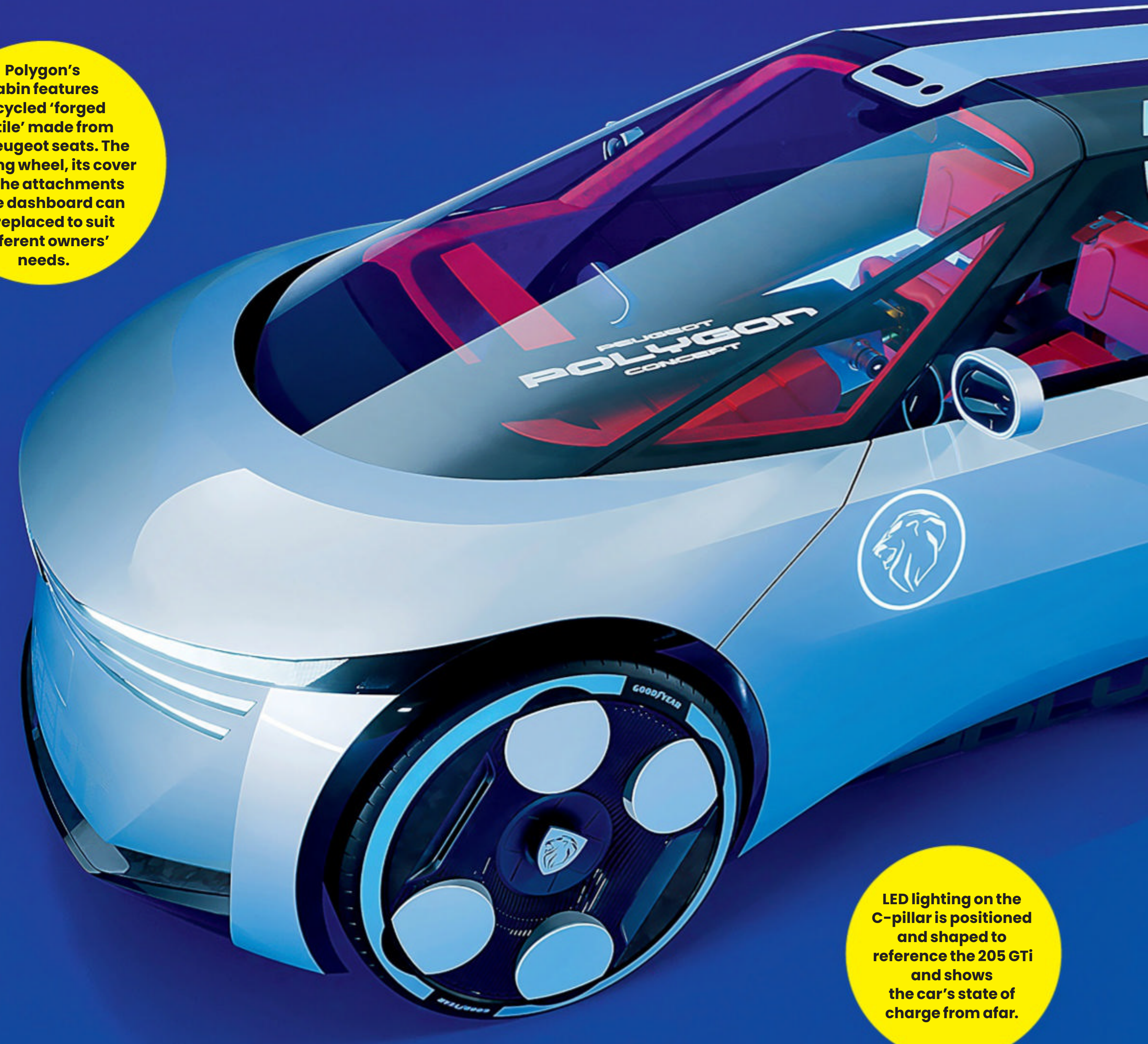
The next-generation Peugeot 208, set to be the brand's first car to feature a steer-by-wire system, has been previewed by the new 205-inspired Polygon concept.

Measuring just under four metres long, the Polygon is so named because it has a rectangular steering wheel, which is key to the next iteration of Peugeot's signature i-Cockpit dashboard design. This steering 'wheel' is not physically linked to the front wheels mechanically but instead uses electronic connections to transmit the driver's inputs to the steered wheels.

This frees up space to completely reinvent the topology of the dashboard: the wheel is set high on the dashboard and there is no traditional instrument binnacle. Instead, information is projected from inside the dashboard onto the Polygon's windscreen, giving a display space equivalent to a 31in touchscreen. The steering wheel's narrow profile means it does not obstruct the driver's view of this projection.

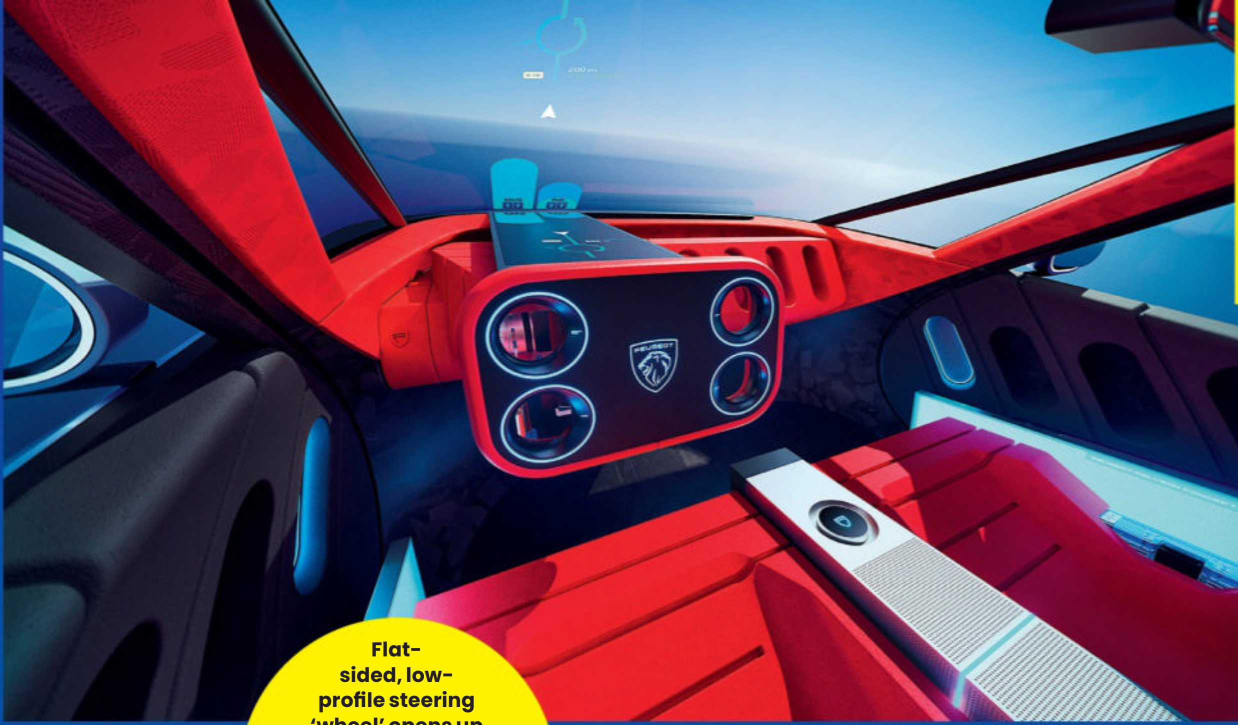
The climate control system is displayed on a small screen atop the iDrive-style dial controller on the centre console.

At low speeds the steer-by-wire reaches full lock when the steering wheel is rotated by just 170deg in one direction, so going from lock to lock will require only one full rotation of the wheel, rather than three, as in the current 208. Peugeot says the steering's quickness provides a sense



Polygon's cabin features recycled 'forged textile' made from old Peugeot seats. The steering wheel, its cover and the attachments to the dashboard can be replaced to suit different owners' needs.

LED lighting on the C-pillar is positioned and shaped to reference the 205 GTi and shows the car's state of charge from afar.



Flat-sided, low-profile steering 'wheel' opens up greater forward visibility and is intended to imbue future Peugeots with a greater sense of agility. Virtual 'rack' slows at speeds to improve stability.

of "hyper-agility", with the rack automatically slowing its rate of response at higher speeds for greater stability. This will be key to the dynamic identity of the brand going forward, CEO Alain Favey has previously told Autocar.

Traditional seats have also been rejected in favour of racing-style 'thrones', comprising 3D-printed shells and large single pieces of moulded foam, which have a protective coating. These can be swapped out in minutes, in theory enabling owners to change the design or colours as they please.

Notably, the Polygon is a three-door hatchback, rather than using the five-door design of today's 208. Although unlikely to make it to production, the concept's 'XXL' gullwing doors provide easier cabin ingress and reduce the number of parts required, which in turn saves costs, said Peugeot.

The Polygon is short and squat with minimal overhangs and little room under the bonnet for a combustion engine, all of which suggests it has been conceived solely as an EV.

Its scuttle sits as low and as far forward as possible to improve visibility of the road ahead and to let in more natural light; the glasshouse stretches across the entirety of the Polygon's roof and tailgate.

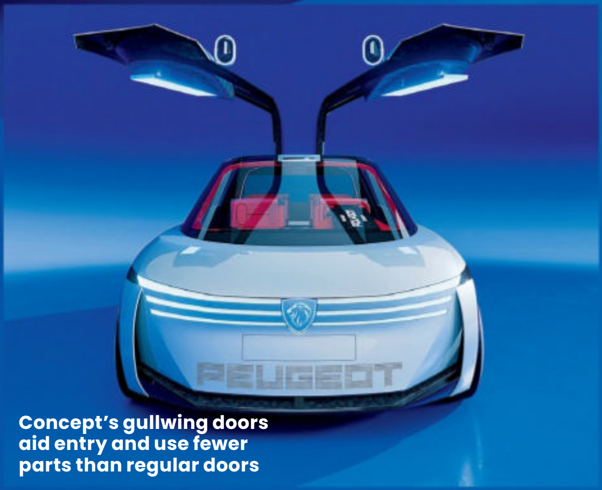
At the front end, the Polygon introduces a new interpretation of Peugeot's 'three-claw' lighting signature, with LED light bars stretching across the width of the car. The rear treatment is reminiscent of the Peugeot 205, with a flat-faced design and distinctive square brake lights.

Peugeot has yet to confirm when the next 208 will go into production but said the Polygon's steer-by-wire technology is due in showrooms from 2027. This suggests the tech could be destined for the 208, which will be due for replacement at around that time.

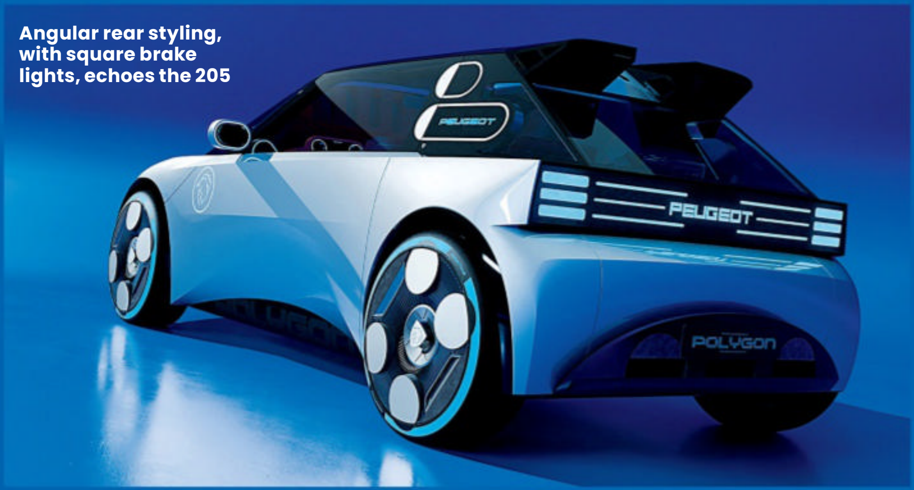
The new 208 will be the first car to sit on parent company Stellantis's STLA Small architecture, and the model is not set to offer a combustion engine option. Battery capacities for the platform will range from 37kWh to 82kWh, promising significant improvements in range compared with the 268 miles offered by today's e-208.

CHARLIE MARTIN

"The steering wheel is key to the next iteration of Peugeot's i-Cockpit"



Concept's gullwing doors aid entry and use fewer parts than regular doors



Angular rear styling, with square brake lights, echoes the 205

TWINGO RETURNS AS AN EFFICIENT, AFFORDABLE EV

Renault reveals sub-£20k compact electric city car with 163-mile range

Renault is hoping to revive the city car class with the new electric Twingo, which has been unveiled in production-ready form.

Twingo programme director Olivier Laik said: "Over the past 10 years, sales of A-segment cars have decreased significantly, from more than one million units per year to less than 600,000. With the increasing number of regulations, the price of these vehicles kept increasing significantly – so as a household's second vehicle, there are fewer sales, and some customers just upgraded to B-segment vehicles for a little more space while paying little more. Those customers are still here, but the offer today is not appropriate."

To that end, the Twingo's key directive was not just to be cheaper than the Renault 5 EV but also to compete with the few combustion-engined city cars that remain on sale, such as the Kia Picanto, to convince buyers to switch to an electric vehicle.

Renault said the Twingo will land in UK showrooms at a price point below £20,000, making it one of the UK's cheapest EVs. It will face an array of competitors, including the BYD Dolphin Surf and the incoming Volkswagen ID 1, which is due in 2027.

The bulk of the Twingo's cost savings are thanks to its battery, which is supplied by Chinese firm CATL. In a first for Renault, the Twingo's battery uses the lithium-iron-phosphate chemistry that is significantly cheaper to produce than the nickel-manganese-cobalt packs used in its existing EVs.

The battery is 27.5kWh in capacity and yields a

twingo
RENAULT

TWINGO
E-TECH ELECTRIC

Twingo's 80bhp motor has been tuned for a quick step-off in town

OFFICIAL PICTURES

A slippery shape and low weight make the Twingo exceptionally efficient

range of 163 miles, making the Twingo one of the most energy-efficient cars on sale, capable of a claimed 5.9mpkWh. This is thanks in part to its low kerb weight, which ranges from 1200kg to 1245kg depending on trim. Aerodynamics also play a major role: there are small fins above the tail-lights to calm the flow of air past the rear end, while the range-topping Techno trim features a set of flush-faced 18in alloy wheels.

The Twingo can be recharged at up to 11kW on an AC connection or 50kW on a DC rapid charger, the latter giving a 10-80% refill time of around half an hour.

Renault says the Twingo will have 'paid off' the CO_2 generated by the production of its battery after 18,600 miles (30,000km) – thereafter being more environmentally friendly than an ICE-powered equivalent.

Power comes from a single electric motor that sends 80bhp and 129lb ft to the front wheels. Being a city car, the Twingo has been tuned for a quick step-off: it can accelerate to 37mph from a standstill in 3.85sec, while hitting 62mph from rest takes 12.1sec.

The Twingo also majors on practicality. In mirroring the 1992 original, it retains the one-box body design – known as 'monospace' – with seating for four. The two rear chairs are capable of sliding, reclining and folding independently.

That set-up means the boot can be expanded as needed, with its capacity ranging from 205 litres to 305 litres depending on the rear seats' position, or up to 1000 litres with them folded. There is also a sizeable compartment under the boot floor for charging cables or small bags.

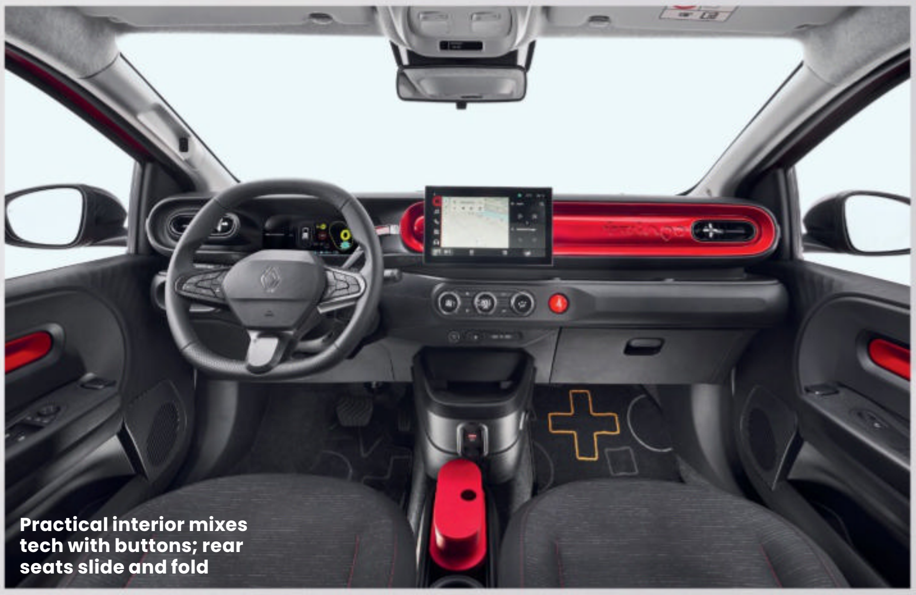
Renault has borrowed sibling brand Dacia's Youclip system to allow for a wide range of accessories. For example, a parcel shelf will not be provided as standard on the entry-level Evolution trim, but there are Youclip mounts in the walls of the boot for hangers, off which a pop-out fabric shelf can be draped.

Physical climate controls, a digital instrument panel and a 10in infotainment touchscreen are standard.

The Twingo will arrive in the UK late next year, completing Renault's three-pronged range of retro EVs alongside the 4 and 5. Reflecting on the trio, Renault Group design boss Laurens van den Acker said leaning on heritage was important for both fighting off new competitors from China and convincing potential buyers to opt for an electric car. "It was a [gamble] with the R5 to make it 100% EV," he said. "But what we see now is people buying the R5 in spite of it being an EV."

CHARLIE MARTIN

"The Twingo mirrors the 1992 original with a one-box 'monospace' body design"



Practical interior mixes tech with buttons; rear seats slide and fold

WILL THERE BE NEW TWINGO VARIANTS?

Renault is looking to create a range of variants for its new Twingo and they could include an open-top model.

Brand boss Fabrice Cambolive mooted plans to sell it with the same canvas roof that will soon be offered on the 4. Unlike a conventional sunroof, the canvas rolls all the way to the C-pillar to create an open-top effect.

"For this [car], it would be very good," said Cambolive but he added that such a model was not in the brand's immediate plans.

Asked about further variants, such as a possible successor to the 2008 Twingo Renaultsport 133, Cambolive said: "It's too soon to say." While he didn't rule it out, he added: "We don't have any project [planned right now] but what for sure is important is this capacity to have a very dynamic life cycle."

Instead, Renault in the first instance will be looking to expand the range of colours and options to keep the car fresh – including, he added, tie-ups with other brands, in a similar vein to the 2001 Twingo TinTin.

"Ultimately, what is interesting is the life-cycle management," he said. "Co-branding, new colours, new types of productivity are very important, and this is part of the plan."

FIRST ELECTRIC BENTLEY TO BE 200MPH-PLUS SUV

Forthcoming battery-powered SUV to begin 'new era' for Crewe firm

Bentley has revealed the first details of its maiden EV, confirming the new model will be able to take on 100 miles of range in just six and a half minutes – a rate that will make it one of the fastest-charging electric cars on the market when it arrives in 2027.

The claim suggests the new EV – what Bentley refers to as a "luxury urban SUV" – could offer charging speeds of up to 350kW. The fastest-charging EV currently on sale in the UK is the Lotus Emeya, which can accommodate speeds of up to 400kW.

To achieve such a speed, however, the Bentley will need a compatible charger. Average charger capacity in the UK is around 120kW, with just a few able to provide faster rates.

OFFICIAL PICTURE

Bentley will pull the wraps off its first electric model next year

During its announcement last Wednesday, Bentley R&D boss Matthias Rabe said the new EV – the official name of which has yet to be confirmed – was "very comfortable, like a Flying Spur, and agile, like a Continental GT". It also possesses "very fast" 0-100mph and 0-200mph times. "It will be the best Bentley on the road," added Rabe.

The car will also be the shortest Bentley SUV on sale, at less than five metres long, and it will slot into the line-up beneath the standard-wheelbase Bentayga. Given its length, the new EV has been configured to offer a "good turning radius", which will be important to its urban positioning, said Rabe.

Further details were not revealed by the Crewe firm during the announcement, but given that the EV will be based on a version of the Porsche- and Audi-developed PPE EV platform, its likely capabilities can be gauged by a comparison with the incoming Porsche Cayenne Electric, which sits on the new platform.

The new Cayenne is offered exclusively with dual-motor, four-wheel-drive powertrains putting out between 400bhp in the base car and 805bhp in the top-rung variant (rising to nearly 1000bhp with launch control). A 108kWh battery is estimated to provide a range of up to 373 miles.

How closely related the two cars will be has yet to be

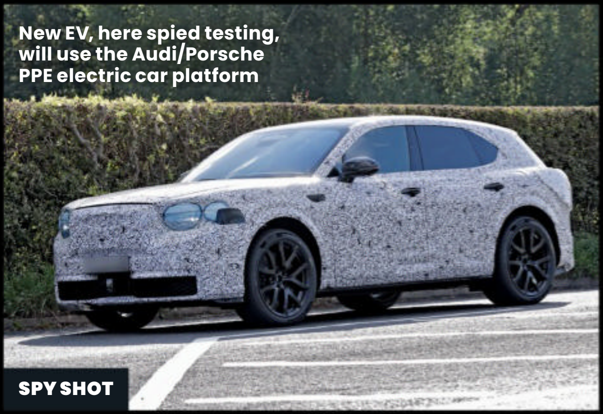
"The new Bentley SUV will slot into the line-up beneath the Bentayga"

HOT NEW DEFENDER PICK-UP

Luxury SUV fettlers Urban Automotive and Heritage Customs have revealed a pick-up conversion for the Land Rover Defender 130. It's powered by a 419bhp supercharged 5.0-litre V8, with prices likely to top £100k.

CATERHAM CHANGES CEO

Caterham CEO Bob Laishley (pictured) has stepped down after four and a half years. He is replaced by Kazuho Takahashi, president of Japanese parent company VT Holdings – in effect giving it greater control.



New EV, here spied testing, will use the Audi/Porsche PPE electric car platform

revealed, but the Cayenne Electric is expected to be almost exactly the same size as the Bentley EV, which suggests scope for close collaboration between the two manufacturers.

Bentley CEO Frank-Steffen Walliser confirmed during the presentation – which featured the first official image of the car, under cover – that the new EV will be launched towards the end of next year, with deliveries beginning in 2027. Walliser said this timeline will not change, even if wider demand for electric cars falls.

Rabe confirmed each EV will contain 30 square metres of leather, which will be fastened by 130,000 stitches from 150 metres of thread.

Walliser said the EV will mark "a bold step forward" and "the beginning of an exciting new era for our brand". **WILL RIMELL**

PROFITS FALL IN WAKE OF US TARIFFS

Bentley's profits fell by 62% – to £101.3 million – in the first nine months of this year.

A combination of lower sales, a slump in demand from China, the expenses related to the cancellation of the Porsche-led electric large-car platform and 10%-higher US import tariffs contributed to the bottom-line figure.

The US tariffs have hit Bentley hard in what is its biggest market, with around one-third of its 7236 sales this year being shipped there.

Asked by Autocar if it made sense to set up a production base in North America to service that market and, therefore, dodge the new import levies, CEO Frank-Steffen Walliser said: "The US is a super-important market to us. We have very loyal customers and lots of fans. But it does not make any sense to build cars there given our volumes and the effort it will take to move production there.

"[On] the tariff… we have got one of the best [rates] in the world. It was 2.5%, but we can handle the 10% [increase]. A British luxury car needs to come from the UK, and this is what our customers are asking for."

BT76 NTY
AUTOCAR IMAGE

Qashqai e-Power recorded 75mpg on an 837-mile cross-UK run

HYBRIDS KEY TO EURO CARBON CUTS, SAYS NISSAN

NISSAN SAYS CAR makers should not be mandated to use exclusively battery-electric powertrains.

Speaking to Autocar, the company's chief performance officer, Guillaume Cartier, said advanced hybrid systems should instead be the route forward, and he highlighted Nissan's e-Power hybrid drivetrains as a system that could play an important role in reducing European car emissions.

The e-Power concept works like a range-extender powertrain, with an engine used as a generator for a small battery, which in turn powers an electric motor – so the car drives on electric power but is fuelled by petrol.

Cartier said e-Power will play a key role in increasing Nissan's electrified sales mix while uptake of pure-EVs lags behind previous forecasts.

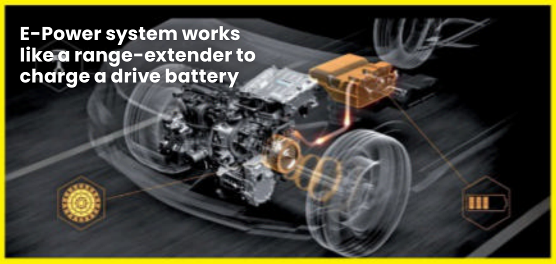
"You have the 'EV-ness' but you don't have the range anxiety," he said.

Cartier said the latest, third-generation e-Power system – as recently rolled out to the Qashqai in Europe – offers fuel efficiency that surpasses "a diesel from five to 10 years ago".

Indeed, Nissan recently achieved 75mpg with a Qashqai e-Power on an 837-mile journey from Land's End to John O'Groats, beating the 67mpg it returned with a diesel in 2007.

Cartier said Nissan could theoretically keep improving, but under current rules it will be unable to sell hybrids in the UK or the European Union after 2035. "Will the regulation open the door for it?" he said. "That is the question mark."

Cartier added that a "reasonable" means of pursuing decarbonisation would be to give car makers "the choice of what other technologies you can use" besides pure-battery powertrains, rather than imposing the technology and the timing "regardless of customer demand".



E-Power system works like a range-extender to charge a drive battery

HYUNDAI HUB'S CASH BOOST

The Hyundai Group has invested €150 million (£132m) in expanding its R&D hub in Rüsselsheim, Germany. The development will result in better-quality cars for Europe, said the company.

CLA HYBRID UNDER £39K

Mercedes' CLA hybrid will arrive in UK dealers early next year, priced from £38,700. That nets buyers the entry-level 134bhp 180. The four-wheel-drive 188bhp CLA 220 is priced from £43,500.

LONGBOW TARGETS DRIVER APPEAL WITH NEW SPEEDSTER

British EV start-up unveils roofless prototype with a 'timeless' design

UK EV start-up Longbow has revealed what it calls a 'full-speed driving prototype' of its incoming ultralight electric sports car – and claims to have created it in about one-third of the time it would have taken for a conventional car manufacturer.

The first car, an £84,995 Speedster due to reach its first customers at the end of next year, was taken from two-dimensional design sketches to running prototype in just six months – by a company that was only incorporated in 2023.

A coupé version of the car, called Roadster, will be built in much higher volume than the Speedster's initial 150 units and will reach the market about a year after at a lower price of £64,995. Orders for both are being taken now, and the first year's run of Speedsters is understood already to have been allocated.

Longbow's founders, Daniel Davey and Mark Tapscott, both of whom have previous connections with EV pioneers Tesla and Lucid, call their design the world's first FEV – for Featherweight Electric Vehicle – that embodies what they refer to as "the Speed of Lightness".

The Speedster will weigh just 895kg at the kerb, even with a 52kWh battery, an inverter and a single rear-mounted electric motor fitted. Power output has yet to be finalised, but it will be "at least 200kW", so 270bhp, the pair revealed Autocar.

Road test trials are just about to begin, but in production the Longbow Speedster is calculated to have a 0-62mph acceleration time of just 3.5sec and a WLTP range of 275 miles. Practically speaking, say the founders, the car's range should exceed 200 miles even when it is driven briskly.

Davey and Tapscott say the car has been created to take a place among the family of iconic British sports cars that include the Jaguar E-Type and the Lotus Elise. They have no plans to produce a model with a combustion engine, but they say the car is an EV simply to embrace the most modern form of propulsion. The emphasis is on longevity and driving quality. "Our car's emphasis is 95% sports car and 5% EV," said Davey.

Part of Longbow's ethos is what the partners call a "100-year accord", an intention to keep the car appealing and relevant a century from now. They have deliberately styled the car to have an appeal that will last, and they believe its EV powertrain will keep it relevant in the long term.

The Speedster's design is said to evoke classic sports cars of the '60s and '70s

OFFICIAL PICTURES

While the car has obvious contemporary appeal, the founders say their designers have deliberately avoided devices that will date and have instead included shape references to great cars of the 1960s and '70s. They especially single out the Shelby Cobra Coupe and Ferrari 288 GTO. The Longbow's shape, in plan, contains a reference to an archer's longbow, drawn back and ready to fire.

"Beautiful cars stay relevant," said Davey. "Their shape keeps them that way. Some of the cars we love most have been around for 60 years. The Ferrari GTO is probably a bit crude under the skin by modern standards, but its shape makes it as great as ever.

"Longbow is designed to be a car for today, but it also refers deliberately, especially in its frontal features, to some of the great cars of the '60s and '70s whose beauty keeps them relevant. We want that for Longbow, and we are clear we won't compromise in future for beauty, even if that has some effect on things like aerodynamics. The one thing we will always promise is light weight."

The prototype doesn't yet have a fully designed interior, which seems spacious for a car whose length and width measurements – 4.2m by 1.8m – are almost identical to those of an Alpine A110. Design sketches combine modern, relatively simple aluminium-based architecture with no sign of a dashboard screen but the twin round dials ahead of the driver instead. There's an old-school ignition key, plus a centrally mounted stick-shift lever that acts as a drive selector.

"Fine dynamics are a crucial part of Longbow"

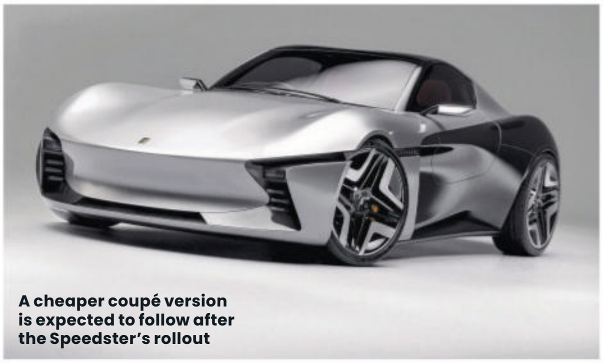
Another key part of the 100-year accord is the extruded aluminium chassis, a newly created version of Cornwall-based Watt Electric Vehicle Co's light and extremely adaptable PACES 'skateboard' platform that integrates the battery into the chassis structure. This saves weight and space and optimises weight distribution to the benefit of cornering handling; the partners see fine dynamics as a crucial part of Longbow's offer. Suspension is by Watt-designed double wishbones all round.

No deal has yet been signed for production. Davey said there are "two or three" UK partners capable of making his cars, but he declined to go further; the urgent requirement at present is to get the supply chain "fully aligned".

Suitable locations could include Lotus's plant at Hethel, which is nowhere near its full 5000-per-shift capacity making Emiras, or in the short term a new 'white label' plant that is being built by Watt EV in the Coventry area to make a variety of vehicles on the PACES platform.

Production numbers are ambitious: 150 Speedsters initially, then around 2000 cars per year once the Roadster is on stream (its more complex doors and roof will have been engineered and homologated by then). Despite no confirmed production base, Davey said the company aims to build 10,000 cars by 2030.
STEVE CROPLEY

Light weight will be a key attribute: 895kg is the target – even with a 52kWh battery


A cheaper coupé version is expected to follow after the Speedster's rollout

WHAT IS ITS CHANCE OF SUCCESS?
STEVE CROPLEY

Despite being born in tough economic times, and in a country lately as famous for abandoned sports car programmes as for those that succeed, Longbow seems to have good prospects.

It boasts secure backers ("we have the investment we need for the commitments we've made"), and its principals are people with considerable experience of modern car-making and whose philosophy is straightforward and clear.

Its major partner companies, Watt EV and Avant Design, are among the best in the country. It has what it calls a 'Holy Trinity' of advisors, with Mike Flewitt, Michael van der Sande and Dan Balmer bringing expertise from McLaren, Alpine and Lotus. And the prototype we've seen so far looks convincing.

The elephant in the room is production. Building 10,000 cars by 2030 – around 40 or 50 cars a week when things get going – looks a tall task unless production facilities have been chosen and are being equipped right now, but Longbow's principals weren't willing (or perhaps able) to confirm the fact. Is this ominous?

Still, the appeal and the backers' justification of the car itself is strong. If an electric sports car is to succeed it needs just the combination of practicality, simplicity and proposed long life evident in Longbow's prototypes and design sketches. Autocar awaits more details, full of hope.

Next big thing
JESSE CROSSE

Nissan has recruited members of the public to monitor its new trial

NEW PILOT STEPS UP NISSAN'S FOCUS ON AUTONOMY

WITH THE PROSPECT of autonomous cars for all looming eventually (please form an orderly queue), it's easy to forget that robot taxis are already on the streets in various locations – and have been for a while.

Nissan recently announced the launch of an 'autonomous mobility service pilot programme', starting in Yokohama, Japan, on 27 November and running until 30 January. The trial will use five autonomous Serena Minivans, which will be monitored at a control centre in the Minato Mirai district close to where the minivans will be running. Operational services will be launched in early 2027, with 300 members of the public recruited as 'general monitors'. Nissan first showcased its latest autonomous drive (AD) technology in March. The pilot scheme is the latest development of the work Nissan has been doing to demonstrate and test AD technology since 2017.

The know-how for the technology has been drawn from research in Japan, in Silicon Valley by the Nissan Advanced Technology Centre and from the UK's evolvAD project. The vans being used in Yokohama are equipped with 14 cameras, nine radar sensors and six lidar sensors, all mounted on the roof of each vehicle. The height of the vans helps provide significantly improved detection and makes assessment of the surrounding environment that much more effective compared with earlier test vehicles. Nissan Leafs were used in the evolvAD project in the UK, for example – those were equipped with a similar array of roof-mounted sensors and put through their paces on a variety of urban residential and complex rural roads chosen for the unique variety of challenges they provided for AD technology.

Data from the sensors is processed by software, and Nissan says AI has significantly enhanced recognition, behavioural prediction and judgement as well as control in various complicated scenarios. The systems contain a number of redundancies – the duplication of hardware and software for back-up purposes in case one set fails. Engineers are taking no chances when it comes to safety, either: they identified a large number of possible scenarios along the test route and added an immediate stop function for emergencies.

According to market intelligence firm IDTechEx, Waymo has established itself as the leader in robotaxi services in the US using modified Jaguar I-Paces, with operations in Phoenix, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Atlanta, and it's also testing in Tokyo. Tesla is operating robotaxis over 170 square miles in Austin, Texas; Zoox and May Mobility have also started operations in the US, with Zoox using a dedicated robotaxi built from the ground up. According to IDTechEx, Waymo's only competitor in China in terms of scale is Apollo Go, which is running more than 1000 robotaxis in 12 cities including Beijing and Shanghai, and it has its sights set on the UK and Germany for next year.

NEW MERC E-CLASS BREAKS COVER AS SALOON-ONLY EV

Seventh-generation executive stalwart to get 500-mile range

Mercedes-Benz has begun testing the seventh-generation E-Class, a car that will arrive in the UK in 2027 as a replacement for today's EQE – and it will have an electric range of around 500 miles.

It will be sold alongside an updated version of the current sixth-gen E-Class as part of Mercedes' split line-up approach that began with the September reveal of the GLC EQ.

The new E-Class will, in technical terms, be completely unrelated from today's car, but the pair will share the same name and key styling elements in an effort to bring more parity between the two powertrains and, therefore, increase electric sales.

This strategy will allow Mercedes to drop the EQE saloon. Since the model was launched in 2022, it has been perceived as too distinct and lacking the everyday practicality of its traditional sibling.

The new electric E-Class is said to keep stronger design and interior packaging ties with its combustion-engined sibling. The EV's larger MB.EA platform could even help increase the interior space offered.

The model is still two years away from launch, but Mercedes-Benz is already talking up its refinement, claiming the noise deadening and comfort levels will be a "benchmark" for the class.

Central to the Audi A6 E-tron rival's look will be a bold new grille similar to that on the new electric GLC and further developed on Mercedes-Benz's Vision Iconic concept car. The grille's design was conceived to make future Mercedes more distinctive.

In internal documents, the EV's styling, captured here by Autocar's spy photographers, is described as "iconic E-Class three-box design", with a "very status-oriented wheelbase offering maximum space and comfort".

This new design will be adopted by the current E-Class as part of a heavy facelift in 2027, Autocar has been told. But while that model will continue to offer both saloon and estate bodystyles, the new electric car is set to be produced exclusively as a saloon.

"The new E-Class sits on the GLC EQ's platform"

The new E-Class sits on the same platform as the GLC EQ and incoming sixth-generation C-Class, meaning both single-motor, rear-wheel-drive and dual-motor, four-wheel-drive models are planned.

Battery capacity is likely to follow its platform-mates. For the C-Class, the most efficient variant is fitted with a 94kWh battery pack for a range of almost 500 miles.

The new architecture uses an 800V system capable of charging at up to 350kW; the EQE's 400V system has a peak rate of 170kW.

The new E-Class won't be produced with an estate bodystyle

Electric E-Class's overall styling will remain close to combustion model's

New grille design is a development of that seen on Vision Iconic concept

This 800V system will also allow the electric E-Class to use Mercedes' latest driver assistance systems, including an optional level-three hands-free autonomous driving mode (in permitted markets). Mercedes boss Ola Källenius described it as a "significant technological step" from that used by the EQE saloon.

Early prototypes feature large, open wheel designs, but these are planned to be replaced in production with more aerodynamic wheels to help bring the drag coefficient close to the 0.22 of the sleek EQE – despite the model's more traditional three-box design.

GREG KABLE

PURE-ELECTRIC TOYOTA HILUX HERE NEXT YEAR

OFFICIAL PICTURES

THE TOYOTA HILUX, the world's best-selling pick-up, will be offered with electric power next year for the first time.

The EV will arrive as part of the Hilux's ninth generation and Toyota claims it is the first time an electric powertrain has been fitted within a body-on-frame chassis. Five 16-cell modules are packed into the frame to combine for a capacity of 59.2kWh, enabling a pre-homologated range of 150 miles.

While the capacity is smaller than that of rivals, such as the Isuzu D-Max EV's 66.9kWh pack, Toyota says a bigger battery would have compromised the 2.5-tonne Hilux's ability. The D-Max, too, offers only 13 miles more range.

Drive for the Hilux is provided by a 193bhp dual-motor set-up.

Created for Europe, it will be sold alongside today's hybrid model. The pick-up will also continue to be available with pure-petrol and pure-diesel in other markets. In addition, Toyota will introduce a hydrogen fuel cell model in 2028.

Toyota is targeting a pre-VAT price of £60,000 for the electric pick-up.

Two electric motors combine for 193bhp

SUBARU'S BRAT LIFE SALUTE

The Subaru Brat pick-up has been reinvented as a tyre-shredding stunt machine with 670bhp.

The heavily upgraded model will be used by rally driver Travis Pastrana in the next Hoonigan's Gymkhana, which is due to take place in Australia.

Key changes include a new turbocharged 2.0-litre flat four (which revs to more than 9500rpm), an aggressively styled carbonfibre body and a host of aero features that help with pitch and rotation when the pick-up is flying through the air.

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Success in the US is more of a priority to Stellantis than Europe

CARLOS TAVARES HAS a new book out. Almost a year on from his departure as Stellantis CEO, the industry's most high-profile and often most outspoken executive of the past decade has used the autobiography to highlight the real possibility of the break-up of the 14-brand super-company, the creation of which he led just under five years ago.

Tavares says in the French-published Un pilote dans la Tempête (A Pilot in the Storm) that daily focus must be given to keeping unity between the French, Italian and US power bases within Stellantis.

Fail at that, and the Portuguese floats one of several possible future scenarios of "a Chinese manufacturer one day making a bid for the Europe business with the Americans taking back the North America operations" – following a blueprint of GM's retreat back to the US after selling Opel-Vauxhall to then PSA Peugeot-Citroën under Tavares.

Indeed, the European and American divisions within Stellantis are operating in such wildly different environments and under such different pressures with diverse rivals that they are in many ways already more apart from each other than they are together.

Tavares's successor Antonio Filosa, speaking on a recent analysts call, said the European and US sides of the business would have to compete for investments but added: "Since I took the CEO role, I made clear that the US market is a key priority for our success." While Tavares came into the Stellantis role from PSA, Filosa was already running Stellantis's North American operations before his ascension – telling in itself about where the focus lies.

There are few examples in the industry today of a company being truly strong, let alone dominant, in more than one region at a time. The Volkswagen Group claims China as a second home market, but "the roof is on fire" in Europe, one boss has said, and the group's US footprint is tiny.

Nissan is in trouble everywhere; Honda has little to no presence in Europe; General Motors and Ford are in effect domestic US operations with small foreign outposts. It is the vast conglomerates of Hyundai and Toyota that perhaps have the best global spread of operations.

Stellantis is no Toyota. Poor performance in the US a year ago was, allegedly, the catalyst for Tavares's eventual departure. A year on and with a new US focus, Q3 sales are up 35% year on year and $13 billion (£10bn) of investment in new products has been announced.

Conversely, Stellantis's market share in Europe is now at its lowest level since the company was created, and in the first half of the year €1.4bn (£1.2bn) in investments were written off, with more to come into next year. Both regions are rarely strong at the same time, as Tavares found to his demise and Stellantis may find in its bid to stay united.

> **"Stellantis's European and US divisions are more apart than together"**

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GOVERNMENT PROPOSES PAY-PER-MILE TAX FOR EVs

Fiscal move seen as EV equivalent of fuel duty has come under attack

Critics have lambasted the government's proposed pay-per-mile tax on EVs, warning that it may put off buyers at a time when car makers are desperately attempting to ramp up sales to hit mandated targets.

Reports suggest chancellor Rachel Reeves will, in her budget later this month, introduce a levy of 3p per mile driven in an EV as part of an effort to plug the gap in fuel duty revenues caused by the transition away from petrol and diesel cars.

The charge will be in addition to the £195 vehicle excise duty that EV owners are required to pay annually.

The measure is set to be introduced in 2028, pending a public consultation. It could raise £1.8 billion a year by the early 2030s.

A government spokesperson told the BBC that charging EV drivers per mile would be "fairer", given drivers of combustion-engined cars have long paid fuel duty – effectively levying them for each mile they drive.

However, the car industry has warned that the move could discourage potential buyers of EVs.

Car industry body the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) has called the proposals "entirely the wrong measure at the wrong time".

It added: "Introducing such a complex, costly regime that targets the very vehicles manufacturers are challenged to sell would be a strategic mistake."

Edmund King, president of the AA, told the BBC the government needs to "tread carefully".

James Court, head of policy for leasing firm Octopus Electric Vehicles, said "now would be far too soon" to bring in such a levy.

CHARLIE MARTIN

HOW WOULD THE SCHEME WORK?

Questions remain over how such a scheme would work – and be enforced.

Reports suggest that drivers would estimate and declare annual mileage when they pay VED. If they exceed this mileage, they will need to pay more; if they drive fewer miles, they will be credited for the following year, rather than getting a refund.

Under the scheme, an EV driver who covers 8000 miles in a year would be charged £435 – £240 in per-mile fees, £195 in VED.

JAECOO 7 SWATS QASHQAI

THE JAECOO 7 outsold the Nissan Qashqai in the UK last month, with 2611 units registered compared with 2461 for the Qashqai. With 10,467 sales for the year to date, this strong performance could place the Jaecoo 7 in the UK's top 10 best-seller list by the end of 2025, its debut year. Oli Lowe, UK head of product for Jaecoo, said: "The way that the Jaecoo 7 has been taken to by the UK public is truly humbling."

JAECOO
LL74 YLT

EMPLOYEE CAR OWNERSHIP SCHEMES IN THE FIRING LINE

THE UK CAR industry has warned that ending employee car ownership schemes (ECOS) could cost more than £1 billion in lost revenue, throttle used car sales and put 5000 manufacturing jobs at risk.

ECOS is operated mainly by car makers and dealers and allows employees to buy brand-new cars at greatly reduced prices. The scheme accounts for around 100,000 registrations every year.

But because they do not pay benefit-in-kind tax or national insurance contributions, the UK government says ECOS is unfair and has pledged to scrap it from 6 April 2026.

The Treasury estimates that taxing ECOS cars as employee benefits would raise £275 million.

However, the SMMT said shutting down ECOS will "put these vehicles out of reach for most workers and reduce a crucial supply of new and increasingly zero-emission vehicles into the market".

GARAGES SPLIT OVER INCREASING MOT TEST FEE

Government review into raising the MOT price cap has sparked debate

MOT
TYRES
SERVICING
REPAIRS
DIAGNOSTICS
boston
VK62 LUO

Garages are arguing that the price of an MOT test should be heavily increased as the government begins a review into the £54.85 fee cap established 15 years ago.

However, there are also concerns among some garages that increasing the fee too much will put off drivers and start a price war that will be fiercer than the one seen today. That's because some centres are willing to take a heavy loss on each test as it is one of the few ways of attracting new customers.

The review was sparked by a petition from the Independent Garages Association (IGA), which argued that an increase was needed to reflect rising business costs.

"This review represents a crucial opportunity to secure a fairer, more sustainable framework for MOT testing that reflects the real costs faced by garages," said IGA CEO Stuart James.

It's unclear what the new test fee will be, but in its current review of MOT charges for HGVs, buses and trailers, the Department for Transport says the fee for these vehicles is likely to rise by around 10%. If applied to car tests, this would equate to a new cap of £59.85.

However, garages are calling for a higher cap.

"To cover costs, the test fee should be about £70," a spokesman for one independent workshop, which wished to remain anonymous, told Autocar.

He added: "On top of paying the tester nearly an hour's wages per MOT, if a garage hasn't got an automated test lane, [they need to pay] an assistant as well. Then there are extra costs associated with the equipment we have to use and the safety procedures required by the DVSA."

Despite the call, "drivers would not have to pay that" in reality, said the spokesman, because fierce competition between centres means "garages undercut each other to gain a customer base". Instead, servicing and repairs from those customers on future visits is seen as more valuable.

A survey of garages by Autocar shows this competition is happening already, with the price of an MOT averaging £45, around £10 less than the maximum fee.

However, one garage – Pickwell Autos of Reading – was offering the test from £29.99. A spokesman said its MOT deal was a loss leader to attract customers: "We need to charge at least £50 to cover the business's expenses and make money, so we're not making any profit at this price but it attracts business. If the official charge increased, we'd still discount it."

Dan Joyce, operations director at Kwik Fit – the UK's largest MOT tester and one that charges the maximum fee of £54.85 – argued that even with any cap increase, motorists are unlikely to feel the rise. "Not all MOT centres charge the maximum fee, so it is debatable whether an increase would have a significant impact on the actual price paid by drivers," he said.

Dan Lewis, a former MOT tester turned trainer, said garages need to consider their position on this. "Garages need to look at themselves," he said. "The trade has been fighting for a rise for around 15 years now but nearly every garage offers a discount on an MOT. Where is the argument for a cost rise if they are able to do that?"

JOHN EVANS

MOT? ONCE EVERY 10 YEARS IS ENOUGH…

The first MOT test was launched in 1960. Called the "Ten-Year Test", it was intended to test the brakes, steering and lights of vehicles once they had been on the road for a decade. The cost: 15 shillings (£0.75). Scan the QR code to read how Autocar reported on it at the time.

MORE CUTS ON THE WAY AS VW'S PROFITS TUMBLE

THE VOLKSWAGEN GROUP will continue to restructure its business in a bid to stay competitive after recording what its financial boss called an "unsustainable" drop in profits for the first nine months of 2025.

The German giant, whose brands include Audi, Porsche and VW, posted a 58% drop in profits to £4.8 billion, down £6.5bn year on year, leaving it with a pre-tax profit margin of 2.3%.

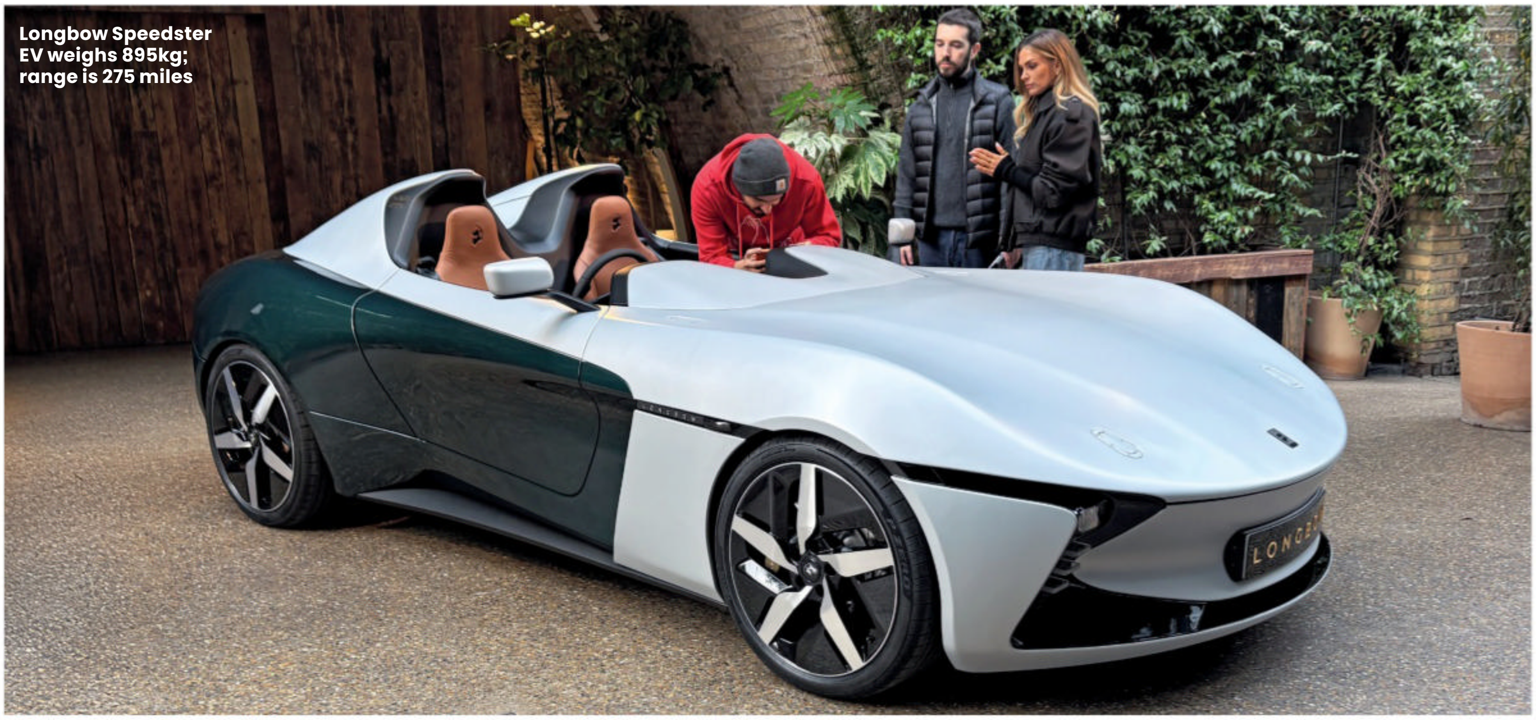
"This is not sustainable for our business model," said CFO Arno Antlitz.

He attributed the profits drop to a downturn in sales in China, the recent £6.6bn restructuring at Porsche and US import tariffs. The tariffs are expected to cost the group £5.3bn by 2027.

To improve its future profitability, the group will continue with its heavy cost-saving measures, which began last year. To date, 12,000 staff have been laid off from a planned 35,000 by 2030.

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley



Longbow Speedster EV weighs 895kg; range is 275 miles

MONDAY

Whenever one of our cars needs servicing, I try to go to the dealership and await collection, because you always learn stuff. I did it today for our Alpine (four-year service, £700) and, as well as learning that A110 prices seem stable, I discovered that since my last visit, my dealership has cut back its Renault-Alpine acreage in favour of Jaecoo and Omoda SUVs. I watched as careful middle-aged couples took test drives and returned smiling, evidently satisfied. What struck me was how European these cars look, not 'foreign' at all. This, their ideal size, the attractive pricing and the dealer's evident confidence in the product is surely what sells them. There's simply nothing to be scared about. Except, perhaps, the demise of the European motor industry…

TUESDAY

A question answered: having driven battery-electric cars for most of the past four years, and seen charging infrastructure improve all the while, I've often wondered what would happen if a whole charging network went down just when it was needed most.

Well, it happened today. I left home for London on a 200-mile round trip in the Renault 5 (for once, only 60% charged), presuming I'd be able to give it a tickle at the charger bank 60 miles away at Reading services on the M4. I arrived to find the whole place in darkness – shops, petrol pumps and all – and confused car-borne customers like me drifting about wondering what had happened.

After consideration, I nipped to the nearby motorway junction to try the services on the other side but no dice there either. Now, heading the wrong way, I drove back homewards to Chieveley services, only a few miles away, to find one of those hateful new knots of human confusion that grow up around overstretched public chargers: people hogging them while they have a meal, other people vehemently pointing this out, cars jockeying to be next but being gazumped by others because there isn't a proper queue. Lots of steely staring, lots of rudeness – and the inevitability of a big delay. I was luckier than most: my appointment wasn't a life-and-death thing and I had just enough juice to get home. So I left them to it.

Jaecoo and Omoda are on the march and wooing customers

> **"It's like a Tesla Roadster without the backpack"**

THURSDAY

I really enjoyed my first viewing – on Autocar's behalf – of the all-new Longbow electric sports car at a studio in London's Brixton, especially since the company's founders – Daniel Davey and Mark Tapscott, both much experienced with past EV projects – took a lot of trouble to explain it to me. They were having a day-long launch for customers, influencers, video makers and the odd old-time hack with a notebook. I especially liked Daniel's image of the featherweight Longbow as being "like a Tesla Roadster without the backpack". In weight terms, the new Speedster undercuts the Tesla by around 300kg. You can read more about it on p12.

SUNDAY

My co-columnist Mr Prior successfully reached Brighton from Hyde Park in this year's Veteran Car Run for pre-1905 cars, driving an '04 Vauxhall. I'd normally have been in the park to see him off but watched this year while taking breakfast in the Brooklands Bar on top of the nearby Peninsula hotel, which gives a panoramic view of cars chuffing under Wellington Arch and down Constitution Hill – as well as everything else worth seeing on the London skyline. I was there at the invitation of car-loving Sir Michael Kadoorie, whose family founded the Peninsula hotel group nearly a century ago, but the chairman himself wasn't there. He was five stories below, heading towards Brighton on a 1903 Cadillac.

AND ANOTHER THING

Behold a CLA cock-up! In a recent story about the new and all-round impressive Merc CLA, I suggested that selecting different drive modes altered the car's suspension rates, as well as stuff like steering effort and throttle map. It doesn't: the suspension stays the same, whatever you do. My once-trusty, seat-of-the-pants ride quality monitor clearly needs recalibration, but I'm not sure how you do that…

GET IN TOUCH
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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

Do you own a smart fridge? The probable answer is no, you don't. In fact you're twice as likely to have no idea what a smart home appliance is than be one of three in 100 people in the UK who own one.

Smart appliances are those that are in some way connected to the internet or a home network. From a chiller perspective, this means your fridge will turn from a machine that keeps your food cold and has a little light that comes on when the door opens into something so much more useful like… well, honestly, it's hard to say. One that plays music, like your phone or stereo or TV already does; or that can tell you what the weather is like, like looking out of the window can. Some fridges have interior AI scanners that can help write shopping lists or even recipes. I don't know if they recommend throwing away those capers that have been on the back of the top shelf for nine years. Either way, according to a recent YouGov survey, they remain an incredibly niche item in Britain. They have, in other words, features most people don't want.

The adoption rates of other smart items is more variable. Nearly 40% of us have a smart energy meter, but there's no way of knowing whether we actually wanted one or were just asked to have one by the electricity company.

The next biggest take-up is in smart alarms, sensors, security lighting or cameras. Though, as with locking front doors, it's hard to know how many people really *want* these, rather than believing that they're the only way to prevent somebody nicking their stuff.

What's not included in YouGov's recent survey is the number of people who own a smart vehicle. Not Smart as in the compact car, but cars that are data-connected. The answer is that it's just about all of the new ones.

Do you prefer a smart fridge or a dumb waiter?

Do we all want that? I'm not so sure. The difference again is that when it comes to how many features and screens and options your fridge has, you have a choice. Even with a smart meter, if you ignore your supplier for long enough they'll give up on the idea. But with a vehicle, you don't get much of an option about the things it comes with.

Partly this is because of a necessity to have an SOS function that will alert someone if you have an accident, and partly because of the creep towards over-air-updates, which leads to the offering of continued services, which means subscriptions rather than ownership. And I suspect that many cars today have too much of that stuff for the likes of most buyers.

> **"Beyond these attributes, it can bog off and leave me be"**

It's hard not to write about this without sounding like an old man yelling at clouds. But I think new cars come with more of this 'stuff' than most people would like; too many screens, too few buttons, too many menus to wade through.

It's not as though I dislike technology. I have computers and games consoles and two telephones and a camera to see the cat when I'm on holiday. The other day I even replaced the light bulb in the fridge.

But I have these things through choice rather than necessity. What I've found 10 months into driving an Audi A2 is that when I get in and drive away, it doesn't irritate the bejesus out of me.

As I think we've found with most domestic appliances, there is a level of 'rightness' with the technology one wants from it. Maybe in a car, it is the fact that it can call someone when the airbags go off. I also want one to be able to read my map and stream audio from my telephone. There are a number of hard safety features I'd like too, of course, from it not catching fire to anti-lock brakes and more. But beyond those – and particularly should anything require a subscription – it can bog off and leave me alone.

My concern is that they don't, and that we've already passed a point of peak happiness, where a car does the things we'd like it to, and doesn't do too many of the things we don't.

GET IN TOUCH
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

"I just need it to tell me if the milk in my fridge has gone off"

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

RAC's Duncan Wiltshire (left) and Colin Goodwin with Gordon Cruickshank's award

Bittersweet emotions as motorsport's awards season kicks into gear. It was an honour to take my place for the first time as a judge for the Royal Automobile Club's Motoring Book of the Year, but boy, did it also twinge as I stepped up in place of my old friend Gordon Cruickshank.

It was at the 2024 awards where I last saw Gordon, who died in December last year. That made his absence all the more poignant. But there were smiles and happy memories as the club honoured GC with its lifetime achievement award, collected by another of his friends, and a familiar face to Autocar readers, Colin Goodwin. How would Gordon have responded to such an award, we pondered? Embarrassment and self-effacement would have figured highly, but I think he'd have quietly glowed with pride, too. Gordon was a wonderfully gifted motoring writer and an even greater person, and we miss him terribly.

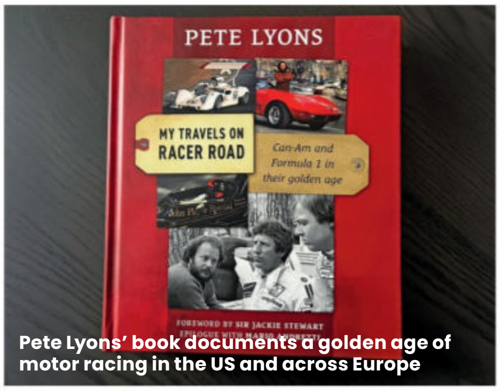
As for the books, my favourite, and one of the winners on the night, was My Travels on Racer Road, the sprawling memoir of revered American photojournalist Pete Lyons. Along with Nigel Roebuck, Pete was a major inspiration behind my own adventures on 'Racer Road' – although as he readily admits in his hefty book, he had the best of it following the Formula 1 and Can-Am trail through the halcyon 1960s and '70s. Before his seasons as one of the great racing correspondents, Pete tells in a chapter called 'Adventures in Wonderland' how he travelled from his native America to Europe in 1961 as he turned 21 – and he didn't go home for nearly two years. Would you allow your son, daughter or grandchild such free rein to roam a continent without a care beyond what's happening today and where they might go next? Different times in what might as well be a different world – but reading Pete's story brought fresh inspiration. The best achievements tend to follow when we're too busy living in the moment to really think about them. Gordon would have loved this book, too.

> “No one can stand against the FIA's current president”

THE BEST OF RACING

Frenetic Formula Ford is still alive and kicking in 2025 – even if the traditional first stepping stone to a career in single-seaters is no longer deemed 'relevant'. As pure racing spectacles go, however, you still can't beat it, as proven once again at the twin Festival at Brands Hatch and the following Walter Hayes Trophy. At the latter Silverstone event, Jason Smyth pulled himself out of a penalty-induced funk from the semi-final to rise from 13th on the grid to win a manic climax, completing a rare Festival/WHT double – the Irishman's Team Dolan Van Diemen survived a last-ditch dive from Jordan Dempsey at the Brooklands left-hander to scrabble over the line. The pair clashed wheels and Dempsey spun, but there was no malice in the moment, in a race that refreshingly ran free from dreaded safety car interventions.

Smyth was overwhelmed in his delight but also admitted he has “no money to go further” – a perennial motor racing tale. It was even true when Pete Lyons was telling racing driver stories 50 and 60 years ago, but somehow today it seems harder than ever for sheer talent to burst through. Like those before him, Smyth must find his own path – while not forgetting to revel in the good bits when they come.



PETE LYONS
MY TRAVELS ON RACER ROAD
Can-Am and Formula 1 in their golden age
FOREWORD BY SIR JACKIE STEWART

Pete Lyons' book documents a golden age of motor racing in the US and across Europe

RACING INTO COURT

There's a new twist in the controversy over who gets to rule motorsport for the next four years. Frustrated by a system that in effect excludes anyone standing against current FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem in the forthcoming election, prospective candidate Laura Villars has launched a legal action through the French courts.

The little-known Swiss racing driver is attempting to achieve a suspension of the meaningless election. Villars told the BBC: “The legal action is grounded [in] the FIA statutes, which commits the FIA to 'respect the highest standards of governance, transparency and democracy', and on the fact that the FIA is a French-law association headquartered in Paris, thus subject to French jurisdiction.

“This step is neither hostile nor political – it is a responsible and constructive initiative to safeguard transparency, ethics and pluralism within global motorsport governance. As I have stated publicly, I am not acting against the FIA. I am acting to protect it. Democracy is not a threat to the FIA; it is its strength.”

Meanwhile in London, Felipe Massa's bizarre case to seek compensation of around £64 million over the “conspiracy” he believes cost him the 2008 F1 world championship made it to the crown court this month. The 'Crashgate' scandal that later emerged, revealing how Nelson Piquet Jr crashed his Renault on purpose in Singapore to help Fernando Alonso win, remains one of racing's darkest moments, and Massa refuses to let it lie. Most racing insiders sympathise – but they really wish he would move on.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

CLIMBING THE LADDER

I enjoyed James Disdale's online article about 'repmobile royalty'.

My first rep job in 1989 came with my predecessor's 1988 Ford Sierra 1.6 L hatch. Having grown up dirt poor on a council estate, this was quite the step up.

Imagine how exciting it was to get a call from the office a few months later saying "you need to be at home next Wednesday: your new car is being delivered". A white Sierra 1.6 LX hatch duly arrived and I felt like a pools winner.

Driving 50,000-60,000 miles per year then, I spent the next seven years enjoying a new car every year or so: a Sierra 1.8 estate, a Vauxhall Astra Estate (eurgh) and a string of Ford Mondeos.

Then I got a promotion and went to work in London. First day, a guy came to my desk. "You the new guy? Here are the keys to your car: it's the Alfa Romeo parked out the back."

It was only a 145 1.6, but I was cock-a-hoop. That car helped me get to know London, as I drove it everywhere, stopping to consult the A to Z at every other lamp-post.

'Kraftwerk'
Via email

Letter of the week

ACTING MY AGE

Having reached the grand old age of 77, I have just achieved a lifetime's ambition of buying my first Ferrari: a beautiful Portofino in Rosso Corsa with tan leather interior and all the bits.

Despite owning well over 60 cars in my busy lifetime and even writing a book on the subject, this latest purchase seems to have created controversy and distress among the majority of my family and friends who are not themselves of the petrolhead variety. I've owned many Porsches, Bentleys and Aston Martins, none of which seemed to cause any concern, but the sight of yours truly driving the new sonorous, bright red beast has provoked both disgust and disdain in equal measure among these individuals. They state unequivocally that I am much too old to be driving such an exotic car, both on aesthetic grounds and with regard to the safety and wellbeing of other road users, even though I have a clean licence and have never been involved in an accident.

My 16-year-old granddaughter, upon seeing me in the Ferrari for the first time, was upset and said that at my age I should know better. However, after a drive round the block while she videoed with all her might (later to be shared on Instagram), she changed her mind, pronouncing the experience and the car 'cool'.

My daughter-in-law, a car nut, sent me an X post about a 94-year-old couple who had bought a new Porsche 911 GT3, which made me feel a lot better, but the carping and criticism from the 'sensible' crowd continues. I would be very interested to hear what other readers think – although, still being in the 'new car' phase, I totally adore the Ferrari, so I really don't care what other people think of me, because I'm having such a great time with it. Nevertheless, I have been threatened with instant divorce if I ever even think of upgrading further.

Martin Morris, via email

FOLLOWING MY FATHER

My dad did a lot of driving for his work. I can remember him being underwhelmed by the Ford Sierra his firm had offered. It was briefly swapped out for a Peugeot 305 diesel, but a new Hyundai dealer had set up shop in the town and seemed to be offering attractive rates on their cars. He ended up with a Hyundai Stellar – based on Ford Cortina underpinnings, had Mitsubishi engines, looked vaguely like a Maserati. I remember it being loaded with fancy kit like electric windows and rear reading lights. Unfortunately it didn't seem to match the economy of the diesels.

BXs and a Xantia followed, but then the company car scheme dropped Citroën and he moved on to a Peugeot 406. I'm not sure what happened at this point in terms of taxation, but it was working out cheaper for him to have a used runabout car and a company van.

One thing the Germans were good at was company car finance. At one point, I worked for IBM and they had a salary sacrifice scheme (more aimed as a limbo tax threshold for execs rather than low-paid juniors like me), and it was cheaper to lease a 3 Series than a Mondeo – not far off a Corsa!

I feel the Vectra was a bit unfairly dismissed. Jeremy Clarkson was in camp Ford – something he admits himself – so had an obvious bias. I think it might have been better if Vauxhall had just used the Vectra name for the Mk3 Cavalier, as Opel did in Europe, where it was seen as an all new-car and so the Vectra B (or Mk1 Vauxhall) was seen as an evolution rather than a revolution. I borrowed a high-mileage example once and it drove perfectly well; I was quietly impressed.

'Wall Meerkat'
Via email

Even the dullest of repmobiles can evoke nostalgia

Daisy is pro ICE car but not all dogs agree. Just like their masters, then

Danny dreams of a regular 5 in a Turbo 3E shell

SICK AS A DOG

Much has been said about the different groups who stand to be adversely affected by the big EV transition, but there's one I don't think has been discussed enough: our beloved canine companions.

Earlier this year, I swapped my Volkswagen Polo for a BMW iX1, partly in the hope that the extra cabin space and smooth EV driving experience might help ease my labradoodle's car anxiety. Sadly it had the opposite effect: her usual back-seat discomfort escalated into full-blown panic attacks.

After trying a variety of family and friends' cars to try to identify the issue, I found that in every EV she looked much more stressed from much earlier in the journey. Research revealed that various EV noises – motor whines, inverter pulses and regen tones – occur at the edge of or beyond human hearing frequencies but are clearly audible to dogs, so I can't help wondering if these were aggravating the issue.

Happily, the iX1 has since been chopped for a 320i – a car we both find to be a far superior product. But it does make me wonder what will happen in 10 years' time, when such an easy switch may no longer be an option. Given how many dogs travel, it's worth manufacturers and vets collaborating to understand how EV acoustics affect them.

Ollie Gheerbrant
Via email

A 2022 study by the University of Lincoln, led by a professor of veterinary behavioural medicine, found that the 20 dogs involved were more relaxed travelling in EVs than diesel cars – KC

FIVE'S A CROWD

I would like to buy a Renault 5 but can't configure one the way I would like: the Turbo 3E's three-door body in yellow with white highlights, the standard 5's yellow interior and the running gear of the Alpine A290, which would surely cost less than half what the Turbo 3E does.

If this isn't possible to engineer, I believe Renault could save a lot of money in the production process with modular interchangeability of parts. If it's a marketing decision, I believe Renault needs to look more at actual customer requests rather than focus groups or hierarchy in the model range.

It's a shame that no manufacturer makes a small three-door any more. I had a wonderful original 5 30 years ago and now drive a Volkswagen Lupo, as the three-door access is far superior to front and back seats than the cramped small five-doors that manufacturers force on us now. I hope one can fulfil my request.

Danny Mercer
Via email

ESTATE THE CASE

I endorse your conclusion about SUVs versus estates in your recent fast SUV group test (22 October). I much prefer estates for their better handling and similar internal packaging, let alone the much lower prices than comparable SUVs.

I'm on my sixth fast estate, including my current Alpina B3 Touring – probably the most capable car out of the 40-odd I've owned. (I've only deviated once with an excellent Alpina XD3.) BMW's introduction of xDrive on its cars negated the only real advantage of an SUV: a four-wheel drive system.

As a petrolhead in his late seventies, I'm prepared to heave myself out of the lower seating for the enjoyment of driving cars with a lower centre of gravity.

Anthony Snook
Via email

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 19 NOVEMBER

SPECIAL ISSUE

BRITAIN'S BEST DRIVER'S CAR 2025

It's the showdown of the year, involving Aston Martin, Ferrari, McLaren, Porsche, Lamborghini and more. Ten great enthusiast cars, one winner

VERDICT

ASTON MARTIN DBX S

Luxury SUV with a wild 717bhp is tested on UK roads for the first time

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USED GUIDE

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FIRST DRIVES

THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

30 HONDA SUPER-N

33 RENAULT AUSTRAL

34 KIA EV4

36 BMW XM

HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 20.10.25, WARWICKSHIRE **ON SALE** EARLY 2026

HYUNDAI IONIQ 6 N

Korean brand's do-no-wrong N division presents its much-anticipated performance EV follow-up act in the wake of the 5 N's runaway success

The idea for a Hyundai Ioniq 6 N has been floating around for some time – since before the regular Ioniq 6 saloon had been revealed, in fact.

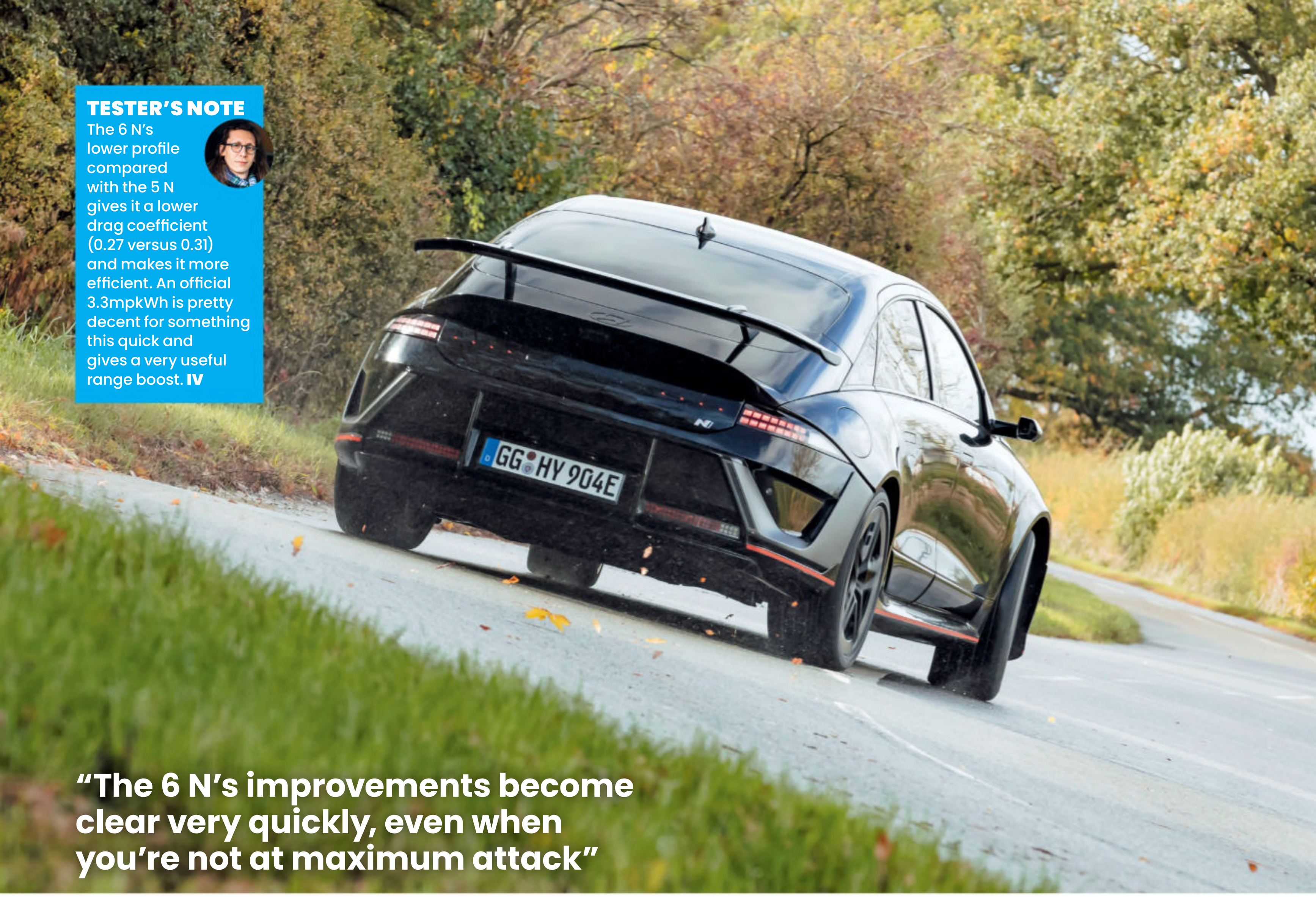
In 2022, Hyundai presented the RN22e concept – clearly an (at that point still unrevealed) Ioniq 6 in signature Hyundai N blue, with huge power and simulated gears. I remember asking whether it was going to see production. "Maybe," they said.

The tech ended up in the Ioniq 5 N, which garnered praise from almost everyone (including a five-star road test from Autocar) and showed that the formula has legs. Now it's time for it to spread to the rest of the Ioniq range.

Hyundai's sporty car department is clearly very eager to N-ify everything, because the Ioniq 6 N is based on the facelifted version of the regular Ioniq 6, which we haven't even driven yet.

There's a lot to cover, then, so let's start with the mechanicals, which, by and large, are familiar from the 5 N. We're acquainted with the 800V E-GMP platform, carrying an 84kWh battery and dual motors, with 235bhp at the front and 406bhp, plus an electronically controlled limited-slip diff, at the back. Hyundai could have dialled up some more power for the optics, but it has shown admirable restraint.

The mechanical changes are actually quite subtle. The dampers are still adaptive, but these are from a different supplier, and various bushings have been reformulated to isolate more vibration. In addition, there are various upgrades to the geometry, the steering precision and the stiffness of the axles and structure. Most of this is unseen, but when you look in the boot, you'll immediately spot the bright orange chassis brace across the rear seatbacks. Clearly this is a car that has been developed more for a trip to Bedford Autodrome than an excursion to Ikea. ▸



TESTER'S NOTE

The 6 N's lower profile compared with the 5 N gives it a lower drag coefficient (0.27 versus 0.31) and makes it more efficient. An official 3.3mpkWh is pretty decent for something this quick and gives a very useful range boost. **IV**

> **"The 6 N's improvements become clear very quickly, even when you're not at maximum attack"**

The 6 N also gets plenty of visual cues to tell you this is the fast one. Whereas the 5 N is relatively subtle and could be confused for a standard Ioniq 5 in N Line trim, the 6 N gets the full super-saloon treatment. Even if you managed to miss the wider wheel arches and deeper splitter, you'll surely notice the swan-neck rear wing. In combination with the duck-tail spoiler underneath, the 6 N gives off Ford Escort Cosworth vibes. A set of 20in alloy wheels complete the package and wear new 6 N-specific Pirelli P Zero tyres.

As well as that N-specific stuff, the 6 N benefits from the same facelift upgrades as the standard Ioniq 6, which in turn means the slightly blobby headlights have been replaced with slittier ones. I always liked the Ioniq 6's quirky style, but this 6 N certainly looks a lot more purposeful than the standard version of the original.

The model-year updates come with some worthwhile upgrades for the interior, too. The door cards are made from a softer material, and the centre console has been reconfigured. I particularly like the slot behind the wireless charger: it saves your phone from rattling around in a cupholder or slowly cooking unnecessarily on the inductive charging pad.

The hard-back bucket seats are the same as in the Ioniq 5 N, but you get a more purposeful driving position because they're set much lower. They also solve one of our chief criticisms of the regular Ioniq 6: tall drivers always felt short on head room in that car. The 6 N's driving position is still much higher than you would find in a current BMW M3 or even the electric Polestar 5, but it's no longer an unnaturally high perch. The seat itself is excellent as well, with plenty of lateral support but without the wafer-thin padding you end up sitting on in some bucket seats.

All of which puts you in the mood to start driving. But wait! First there are menus to explore. In truth, you can just leave it Comfort mode and drive off, but since we're here… As usual, there are different settings for the powertrain, the e-diff, the stability control, the suspension and, of course, the Active Sound. If you really have the space and inclination, you can play with the front-to-rear torque distribution and the Drift Optimiser. The latter now gives you options to in effect custom-order your drift, with separate settings for the initiation, angle and wheel spin. Today's drive was limited to the road, so we'll try those things another time.

Luckily, the 6 N's improvements over the 5 N become clear very quickly, even when you're not at maximum attack. Despite shorter tyre sidewalls than those on the 5 N, the ride is instantly better. High-frequency inputs are filtered out much more effectively, making it noticeably calmer. It's still a sporting car that probably has some fairly beefy anti-roll bars, so there's a bit of head-toss over uneven roads, but you would probably be quite content driving this every day.

The first roundabout also showed the steering to be improved.

Ride is good considering the 6 N's remit, with sharp intrusions ironed out well

New buckets are excellent; steering is light but chatty; UK won't get camera mirrors

Hyundai's N cars, including its petrol-powered ones, suffered from slightly artificial steering. Although accurate, it has always had a bit of stiction typical of EPAS racks. It's not completely gone here, but the steering feels lighter and smoother, and it offers a bit more feedback.

It's still not a highlight, but it's on the level of an M3 and sufficiently lets you gauge the strong front end. But while the 5 N's (and the M3's) rear end can easily be teased into a benign couple of degrees of oversteer, the 6 N feels somewhat snappier, at least in the damp conditions of our testing day.

Naturally, the 5 N's party trick of simulated gears returns, here with an upgrade of its own. The eight gears are now shorter to keep you busier, and the synthesised sound has gained a different character. Whereas the 5 N mimics an i30 N with an automatic transmission, the 6 N is more free-form. It sounded like a V6 to me, albeit a slightly low-resolution one, like you might hear in a 1990s video game. I found it no less immersive, because I like that it's not trying to imitate something exactly. It's like a good cover version of a real engine: the behaviour is still usefully realistic, clattering into the rev limiter if you don't upshift in time and bogging down if you try to accelerate in eighth gear from 30mph. You turn it on and off using a single button on the steering wheel, so it remains a fun thing to play with that can be simply dismissed when you would rather enjoy the quiet, instant torque of an EV.

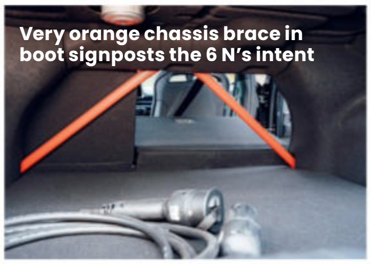
In many ways, then, the Ioniq 6 N is the improved version of the five-star 5 N. It loses some practicality, of course, but the trade-off is that it feels more like a natural driver's car from the outset, being based on a saloon rather than an SUV. Somehow it's not quite as exciting, although that might just be because the shock value of Hyundai making a genuinely fun EV has subsided.

Viewed as its own thing, there isn't really anything like the Ioniq 6 N. Although prices haven't been confirmed yet, they're likely to be slightly above those of the 5 N. A Porsche Taycan, even the entry-level car, is much more expensive, and so is a BMW M3. Any other fun EVs tend to be much smaller and quite a bit less practical.

It's good to see Hyundai evolving the formula. Now imagine what it could do with the upcoming Ioniq 3.

ILLYA VERPRAET

The interior has been upgraded in terms of materials and finish



Very orange chassis brace in boot signposts the 6 N's intent

TECH SPEC

HYUNDAI IONIQ 6 N

Objectively improves on Hyundai's 'fun EV' formula in a number of ways, but we're undecided whether it's actually more fun

Price £69,000 (est)
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 641bhp
Torque 568lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2250kg (est)
0-62mph 3.2sec
Top speed 160mph
Battery 84/80kWh (total/est usable)
Range, economy 303 miles, 3.3mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Porsche Taycan, Alpine A390, BMW M3

TESTED 30.10.25, HAGA, JAPAN **DELIVERIES** SUMMER 2026

HONDA SUPER-N

Forthcoming funky electric city car reveals itself in prototype form

Honda's UK boss Rebecca Adamson says the new Super-N is not intended to be a successor to the handsome yet short-lived E – despite the obvious visual and conceptual links.

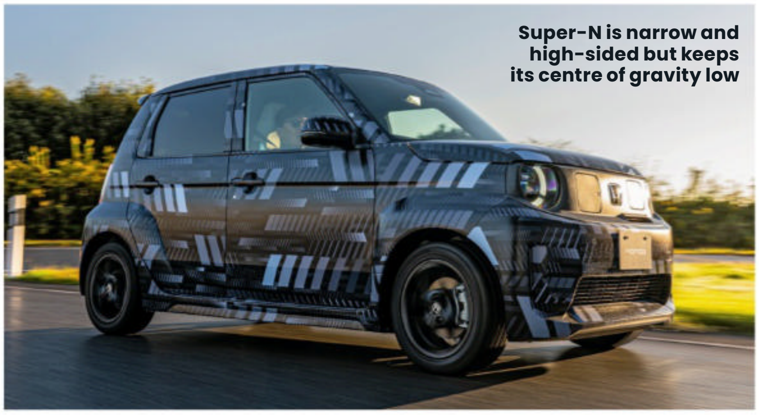
She acknowledges that it's still a "very funky, cute Honda" but insists it's not based on the E "in any way". Instead, Honda's second take on a quirky electric city car for the UK is a hot version of the N-One E it sells in Japan – a model that's based on the petrol-powered N-One kei car.

The long and (very) short of it is that the Super-N measures just 3.4m long, weighs a little over 1300kg, seats four and looks oh-so-adorable, even in the feistier performance garb it will wear in the UK as part of a raft of export-focused changes that include simulated gears and a fruity 'engine' note. The spirit of the City Turbo II lives on.

The key differentiator between the Super-N and the E, though, is that the new car really must get to work bolstering Honda's EV sales mix. The E was a halo product – a premium-leaning, tech-heavy flag-bearer for the Japanese firm's bold electric age that was pitched well clear of the mainstream at an eyebrow-raising £37,000 despite having a shorter range than nearly any other electric car on the market.

"In terms of what it will do for us, the price point will be important," says Adamson of the Super-N, by contrast. "And the opportunity for this car is not only our existing customer base." The plan, then, is for the Super-N to appeal as much to young drivers in the city as it does to existing CR-V and HR-V owners, for example, who need a smaller station- or school-run conveyance.

The car is still half a year from showrooms so Honda won't give even a rough steer on pricing, but given that the Super-N is more upmarket than the £15k Dacia Spring and Leapmotor T03, a start price of just under £20,000 seems likely. That would line it up neatly against the incoming Renault Twingo and Volkswagen ID 1 and means it could cost just a little over half the price of the car it replaces. If so, following a go in a near-ready prototype, the Super-N could be punching above its weight.



Super-N is narrow and high-sided but keeps its centre of gravity low

The high ceiling, straight sides, step-through front cabin and low floor create a decently roomy interior that's less dazzling than that of the E but no less functional. No wood trim, virtual fish pond or digital mirrors here, but the materials all feel reassuringly hard-wearing; Honda's 'Magic' seats in the rear flip and fold to accommodate bulky loads; and there are chunky physical buttons all over the wheel, dashboard and centre console.

It sits on the right side of basic, too: there's a 9in central screen, a 7in digital gauge cluster, USB-C chargers, a heated steering wheel, adaptive cruise control and electric windows in both rows.

Honda won't tell us yet precisely how different the Super-N is from the N-One E, beyond the fact that it's more performance-focused. The suggestion is, though, that there's still a 29.6kWh battery under the floor giving slightly less than the standard car's 183-mile range and capable of charging at up to 50kW.

Technicalities aside, even in the space of a few laps on a tight, twisting handling circuit, it was clear that the focus has been on making the Super-N feel stable, controlled and – crucially – engaging when it's called for.

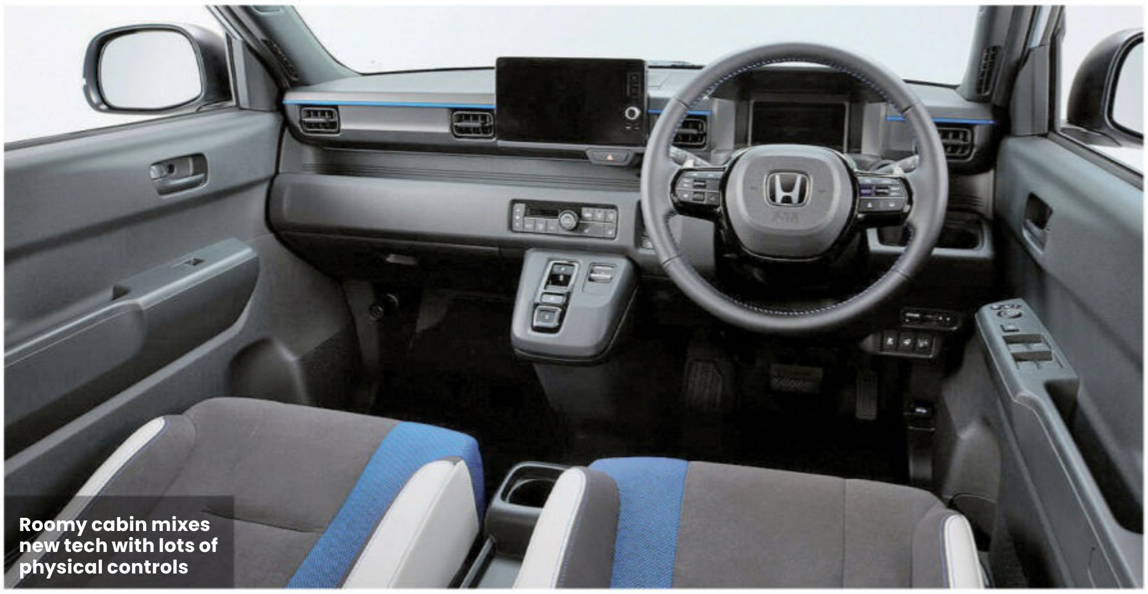
It's predictably sedate in its standard mode, nipping off the line with a spiritedness that's common to all EVs but then bleeding off the urgency in its responses as it passes 20mph and generally feeling agreeable but relatively homogenous in character.

Boost mode is where it gets fun: the throttle responses become sharper and the full reserves of the front motor (unknown quantity though that is) are liberated to give a real sensation of shove as you wind it up. I couldn't guess at the extent of any power boost the Super-N has received, but it certainly felt like more than the standard car's 63bhp.

More important than any cold, hard stats is that the Super-N's sensory enhancements over the standard car make it *feel* livelier. Unlike the Abarth 500e's droning fake exhaust noise, the Honda's soundtrack is more than a little like a Type R's turbocharged four-pot – although engineers say it's not modelled on any engine in particular. Amusingly, while testing it in the UK, Honda's engineers found our roads to be so rough and rutted that they couldn't hear the 'exhaust' – they had to pump up the sound-generation volume for cars coming here.

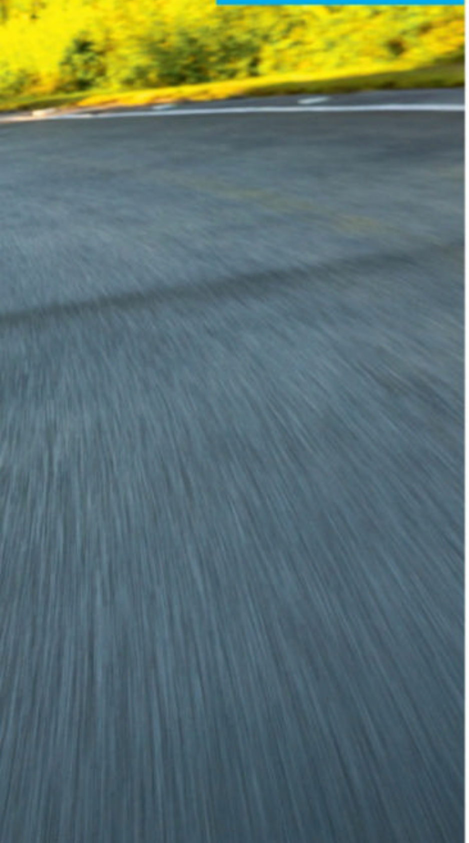
It's quick-steering with good body control, but torque steer was evident

"The simulated gearbox is impressively realistic, and there's even a fake rev limiter"


Roomy cabin mixes new tech with lots of physical controls

TESTER'S NOTE

The artificial engine note is only piped into the car, rather than booming obnoxiously out of an external speaker, so you can use it without fear of inviting eye-rolls from confounded bystanders. **FP**



The simulated seven-speed gearbox is impressively realistic, too, with torque output varying according to the notional 'ratio' you're in – like in the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N. There's also a simulated kickdown, so you can still drop a gear and disappear. If you hold it at the redline in manual mode for too long, there's even a fake rev limiter that will cut in – a fun little Easter egg to go looking for.

The Super-N is afflicted by that inevitable top-heavy stance that's common to kei cars, but it benefits dynamically from the battery's location under the floor: it gives a centre of gravity that Honda says is lower than that of many 'petrol sports cars'. Because the battery is so small, it also means the seat bases are at the same level as those in the petrol car, so you don't feel perched unnaturally high.

That combines with the extra stability afforded by the wider track and the wheels being pushed right out to the corners of the body to make for a cheeky-feeling handling package. The steering could do with more feedback but is nonetheless quick and responsive, and I was impressed by how well it kept roll in check through tighter curves.

Unlike the E, the Super-N is front-driven and did seem prone to torque steer when hoofed out of a hairpin – but the fairly serious-looking, 185-section Yokohama Advan Sport tyres worn by our prototype did a good job of pulling it back in line in the absence of any trick front diff.

We need more time with the Super-N (and its upcoming rivals) to properly gauge its competitiveness, but even now there's nothing to stop us just being glad it exists. Electric cars need to be smaller, cheaper and more whimsical to win over the cynics, and first impressions suggest Honda's attempt to crack that code could be a decently rounded crowd-pleaser.

FELIX PAGE

TECH SPEC

HONDA SUPER-N PROTOTYPE

An intriguing attempt to imbue a humdrum city car with real driver appeal, but we need to know more

Price £20,000 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power na
Torque na
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1350kg (est)
0-62mph na
Top speed na
Battery 29.6kWh
Range, economy 170 miles (est), na
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Renault Twingo, Volkswagen ID 1, Hyundai Inster

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Steve Cropley

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UK VERDICTS

TESTER'S NOTE
There are paddles on the steering wheel, but they only adjust the strength of the regen. Letting drivers control that madly complicated gearbox would be asking for trouble. **IV**

TESTED 29.10.25, OXFORDSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

RENAULT AUSTRAL E-TECH

Facelifted SUV eyes class honours with a more down-to-earth approach

Renault's Sportage rival, the Austral, has had a mid-cycle update. You'll recognise it by the new headlights, which trade the distinctive 'C' shape of the original for slimmer main units and Scenic-style light-up sideburns. More interesting, though, are the technical changes.

For a model's mid-cycle update, manufacturers will usually try to draw our attention with some sort of new feature. Hark! Our suspension is now 20% smoother and the infotainment is 15% faster. Not so with the facelifted Austral. It was launched with four-wheel steering on the posher versions – quite an advanced feature for a car in this class. That has now gone, along with the rear multi-link suspension.

Good riddance, I say, because in an unusual twist, de-contenting has made the Austral a better car.

The original was a neatly styled, above-averagely practical car that was capable of distinguishing economy and had very good infotainment, but it was plagued by a wooden ride and weird, twitchy handling that was out of keeping with its mission as a sensible SUV.

With the four-wheel steer relegated to some markets other than the UK, it now handles quite neatly indeed – as medium-sized SUVs go. The steering is well weighted and progressive, and there isn't much body roll. The ride is still an issue, however. It was firm and wooden on the multi-link set-up, and it still is with the torsion beam. You could probably live with it, but it's unnecessarily irksome.

Apart from that, there is a lot to like. The hybrid powertrain is particularly impressive. This is Renault's usual clutchless system, but with a turbocharged 1.2-litre three-cylinder engine and five speeds rather than the more common 1.8-litre with four speeds. Most of the time, the 80bhp electric motor does most of the work, and you're simply not aware of the engine. Apart from a low-level rumble, you only really hear it in the rare situations where it needs to work hard, such as if you're going full throttle or when it starts up for the first time and uses a high idle to warm up. Over the course of a week, it returned more than 50mpg, which is similar to the Nissan Qashqai and much better than the Kia Sportage.

Inside, it has competitive rear leg room and a big boot (527 litres), which can be expanded by sliding the rear bench forwards. You can even option a spacesaver spare, which is a rarity for a hybrid.

The seats are relatively comfortable and have a massage function but lack cushion tilt adjustment. Otherwise, the interior style and materials feel upmarket, and build quality is solid enough save for the buzzy sunroof switch in our test car. Renault's Google-based infotainment is typically swift and mostly logical, and there is a decent selection of physical controls.

The Hybrid is the only powertrain offered in the UK (other markets also get a mild hybrid), and prices for it start at £34,195 for Techno trim. That's more than a petrol Kia Sportage but in line with the Hybrid. The range-topping Iconic Esprit Alpine costs £38,695, and there are no options other than a choice of different paints and that spare wheel.

The Austral has a ton of rivals: Ford Kuga, Volkswagen Tiguan, Skoda Karoq, Nissan Qashqai, Hyundai Tucson, Mazda CX-5, Citroën C5 Aircross and many others. Despite that, it's a class with no obvious champion. The Austral also isn't it on account of its compromised ride, but apart from that is quite recommendable.
ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

RENAULT AUSTRAL E-TECH ICONIC ESPRIT ALPINE

Classy, practical interior, decent handling and refined powertrain, but lacking old-school comfort
★★★★☆
Price £38,695
Engine 3 cyls in line, 1199cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor and ISG
Power 197bhp
Torque na
Gearbox 5-spd automatic (engine), 2-spd automatic (motor), FWD
Kerb weight 1538kg
0-62mph 8.4sec
Top speed 112mph
Economy 58.9mpg
CO$_2$, tax band 108g/km, 27%
Rivals Kia Sportage, Mazda CX-5, Ford Kuga

Solidly built cabin has a premium feel and usable tech

It steers nicely and handles well, but the ride is still too firm

“Full paddle-shift manual control of battery regeneration makes for perfect drivability”

TESTED 4.11.25, BERKSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

KIA EV4

Curiously conceived electric hatch aims to offer an alternative to SUVs

This is Kia’s new European market-targeted, mid-sized hatchback. The EV4, now touched down in the UK, has come to play the low-rise, eye-catching counterpoint role in its maker’s otherwise SUV-dominated line-up of all-electric options.

It is built in Europe (alongside the EV3 at Zilina, Slovakia), and it’s a classically European type of car, insists Kia, so as Europeans we should love it. Except that it’s not at all classic-looking. It’s conventional and unconventional at the same time and a thoroughly progressive prospect in one of the best-established, most mainstream classes of the continental new car market. It is, in short, as challenging a sort of car to think about as it is to look at.

As ever when it comes to electric cars, there are practical reasons why this car doesn’t – and can’t – look like a more typical mid-sized hatchback, not least that the underfloor drive battery stretches out the wheelbase and diverts the cabin packaging upwards while the absence of an engine up front allows a more cabin-forward silhouette. It’s certainly bold and different, and while I can’t deny that it does slightly resemble some gigantic man-eating plant when viewed from just the right angle (yes, really), I quite like it.

I’m not convinced it’s quite the mid-size hatchback you would expect Kia to make, though. Or, for that matter, to serve as an alternative to a boxy, upright SUV like the EV3 or even, come to think of it, to follow in the tyre marks laid down by the EV6 four years ago.

It is fairly square, upright and boxy itself, after all. It’s front-motored and front-wheel drive, and it’s big and heavy for its class and not especially stirring or sporty-feeling to drive. As invitations not to buy an SUV go, then, this isn’t the most obvious choice, and neither is it the neatest fit for a youthful, sporty brand such as Kia, if you ask me. It’s an interesting choice, for sure. But not an obvious one.

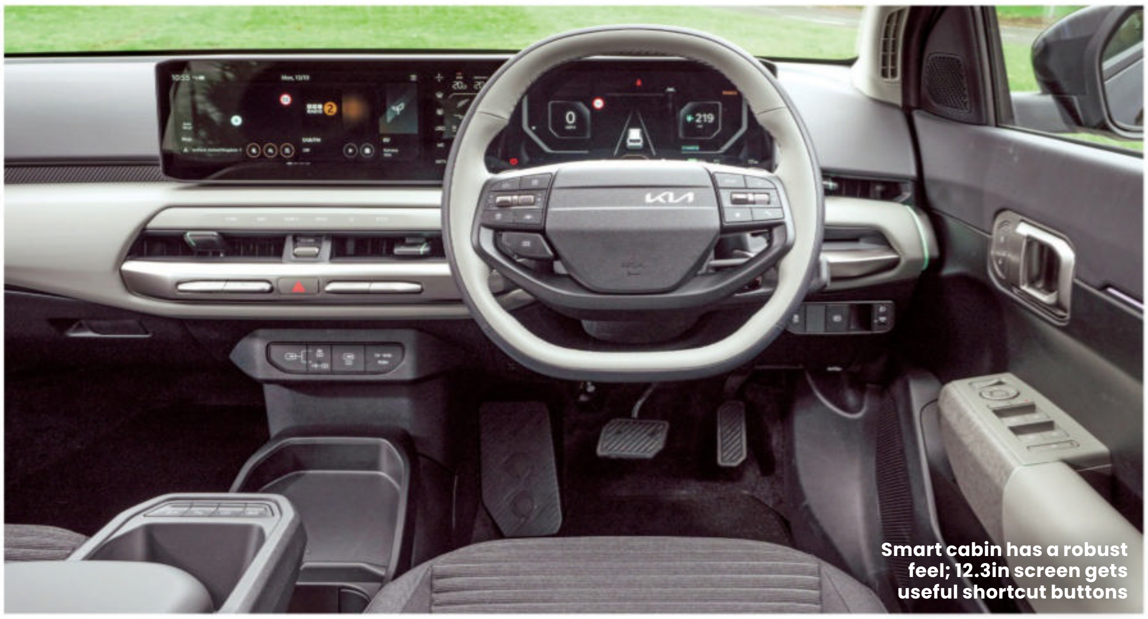
The EV4 enters a class of all-electric hatchbacks that has been populated a little bit gingerly. It’s pricier than many of its direct

A long wheelbase hampers agility; ride is good on 17in wheels

TESTER'S NOTE

Kia says most will go for mid-level GT Line trim, but they will be missing a trick: the 17in wheels of the Air model make a decisive difference to both efficiency and ride comfort. I'd have a big battery on an entry-grade car. **MS**

The EV4 struggles to mask its size and mass when pressing on



Smart cabin has a robust feel; 12.3in screen gets useful shortcut buttons

competitors – the likes of the Vauxhall Astra Electric, Cupra Born and Renault Megane E-Tech – partly just because it's positioned that way. It's bigger than most of those opponents and more powerful than many, and it offers greater electric range – especially if you go for Kia's 81.4kWh drive battery.

But it's also the case that Kia doesn't qualify for the UK government's electric car grant at present, because its business has not yet secured the necessary Science Based Targets Initiative accreditation. If you buy a lower-trim EV4 Air on finance, however, Kia will give you a deposit contribution equivalent to the value of the grant anyway, so the sums ought to work out closely enough to be comparable.

Our first test of the car on UK roads gave us opportunities to try both standard- and long-range batteries, both of which feed the same 201bhp, 209lb ft electric motor. The former offers 273 miles of claimed range, which is about where several of its rivals are; the latter goes as far as 388 miles, depending on trim level. According to our testing, the 58kWh car's real-world range, on mixed roads, is probably more like 220 miles, while the 81kWh is closer to 300. But both remain good adverts for the EV4: in this class, cars genuinely capable of covering more than 250 miles on a charge are still fairly few.

The EV4's interior is another strength. Although suffering a little from what we might call the skateboard EV packaging problem, it is still spacious in both rows (the Korean-made Fastback version is one to avoid here, because the lower roofline adversely affects head room). The boot is a generous size by hatchback-class norms. The whole package feels more Skoda Octavia- or Honda Civic-adjacent than Volkswagen Golf- or Vauxhall Astra-sized, so fairly generous and family-appropriate.

The driving environment is smartly presented, with materials and switches that both look and feel solid and hefty rather than in any way plain or cheap, even in entry-level Air models. The 12.3in touchscreen console is easy enough to navigate via the menu shortcut 'buttons' at its base, and the car's ADAS controls are quite easy to disable, should you want to.

Where the EV4 feels least like a classic European hatchback, however, is in how it drives. It performs assertively enough, only occasionally exceeding its traction levels at its front axle under full power, while Kia's insistence on offering full paddle-shift manual control of battery regeneration makes for perfect drivability.

But it does handle like a bigger car than you might expect. Even the 58kWh EV4 feels quite languid and heavy with its body movements on country roads, long enough in its wheelbase to banish any chance of abiding natural agility and a bit leaden, numb and inert through the steering. Lateral body control is quite good, but there still isn't any sense that the EV4 responds in turn to being driven keenly. Ride isolation is good, too, if you stick with the 17in alloys of Air trim, but it's less impressive on GT Line and GT Line S models, which ride on 19s.

Optimise this car for value, efficiency, refinement and comfort, then, and the EV4 ought to do plenty well, although nothing with quite the charm or dynamism to make it a true European-market great.

MATT SAUNDERS

TECH SPEC

KIA EV4 58.3KWH AIR

Looks strange but impresses with range, drivability, comfort and space, if short on enthusiast appeal

★★★½☆

Price £34,695
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 201bhp
Torque 209lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1811kg
0-62mph 7.5sec
Top speed 105mph
Battery 58.3kWh (total)
Range, economy 273 miles, 4.2mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Renault Megane E-Tech, Vauxhall Astra Electric

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5785

BMW XM

An emphatic dynamic statement or just an M-barrassment?

MODEL TESTED
BMW XM 50E
Price £112,820
Power 469bhp
Torque 516lb ft
0-60mph 5.0sec
30-70mph 4.4sec
Top speed 155mph (claimed)
Average economy 24.3mpg
Electric range 57 miles
CO_2 emissions 100-106g/km
70-0mph 55.8m (10deg C, damp/wet)

There remain some at BMW who still rue the company's decision not to follow up the M1 supercar of 1978 with a second-generation model. And perhaps then a third, fourth and fifth. They believe such a lineage would have stood the company in excellent stead, because – hey, look what Porsche achieved from a brand perspective with the timeless 911.

You can imagine how delighted these people were when mutterings on another M-bespoke creation – the very first since the M1 – began to circulate in the 2010s. It's also not hard to imagine how disheartened they were when it became obvious that this car would in fact take the form of a large, hybridised SUV.

We would be lying if we said we didn't share some of that disappointment, but the reality is that the performance SUV market is currently propping up some rather illustrious companies. In short, there appeared to be a business case for the hulking XM.

Luxury performance SUVs are also often grudgingly good. Certain derivatives of the Porsche Cayenne and the Aston Martin DBX can reasonably be claimed to be 'driver's cars'. When you consider the magic that M can work on a full-size saloon, it was no stretch to imagine an M SUV being very capable indeed, and at a price the ultra-premium marques couldn't match.

We've waited three years to get our hands on an XM in the UK, in order to subject one of these highly divisive vehicles to proper road test scrutiny. We'll do it with an open mind, because while the exterior design has no shortage of critics, the lavish cabin is another matter, and BMW has also gone all out on this car from a hardware perspective. The likes of the old M5 CS and the current PHEV M5 demonstrate how well the company can disguise mass and fine-tune electronic chassis systems for true driver appeal. If the XM is able to hoick up its dirndl and dance on the table, it may win a few more fans.

The headline-making model is the 4.4-litre V8 hybrid, which first appeared in 2023 and donated much of its powertrain to the first PHEV M5. Here, however, we test the entry-level XM 50e, which uses a 3.0-litre six-cylinder engine. It arrived in 2023 as a more emissions- and wallet-friendly model, and at £113,000 is priced in line with similarly punchy versions of the Cayenne and Range Rover Sport.

M1 was the last dedicated M car

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Versatile PHEV powertrain; excellent weight distribution
CONS Thuggish demeanour; very heavy indeed; 50e lacks the M diff

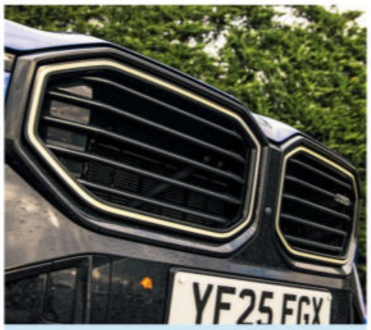
It is difficult to know where to begin with the XM's brutish exterior design, and it's fair to say the market has also been unsure. In the six-figure price bracket, looks matter, and the simple fact is that the XM is the slowest-selling car BMW makes, now that i3 production has ended. We would only highlight the rising beltline, prodigiously broad tail and caricaturish silhouette, and move on to more mechanical matters.

On our scales, even the junior partner in the XM line-up weighed 2639kg. That makes it 93kg heavier than the V8-engined (BMW-sourced) Range Rover Sport SV, despite that car's additional cylinders and off-road chassis hardware. The XM is also 39kg heavier than a LWB Bentley Bentayga. The mitigating factor is that the BMW carries a near-30kWh battery pack beneath the rear passenger compartment, though there's no escaping the fact that it is a heavy machine given its driver-focused pretensions. At least the weight distribution is excellent. A 52% rear bias is about perfect, especially in a class when most cars are heavier towards nose than tail.

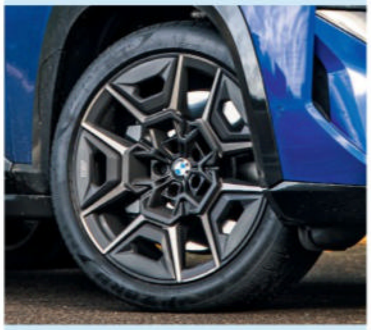
That kerb weight starts to make more sense when you consider the size of the XM. At 5110mm long and 2235mm wide, the XM's footprint is considerably greater than that of a Cayenne or Range Rover Sport. In fact, the car is longer than a Range Rover proper, and so it would be a mistake to consider the XM anything other than a full-size SUV. The 3105mm wheelbase is identical to that of the seven-seat X7.

Underneath the bluff bonnet sits the first real surprise. BMW may bill the XM as an M car but the 50e uses not the twin-turbo S58 straight six from the M3 and co but the milder, single-turbo B58, today found in cars ranging from the Morgan Supersport to the Ineos Grenadier. Here it makes 308bhp at 5000-6500rpm – a figure that swells to 469bhp when you factor in the gearbox-integrated permanent magnet synchronous motor to which it is mated. Whether you go for the 644bhp V8 XM or the six-cylinder car, that gearbox is a ZF-sourced eight-speed automatic with identical ratios to that of the M5 but a longer final drive.

Downstream you will find one of the more significant differences between the two strains of XM. Only the V8 model is fitted with the torque-vectoring M Sport differential. The 50e does without, using only a multi-plate clutch that continuously alters the torque split front to rear, though it can use the brakes to simulate torque vectoring.



■ The car's unmissable grilles are made even more glaring by unbroken illumination rings, recently seen on the M5. Three years on from launch, the proportions of the XM's snout still take some adjusting to – it's huge in relation to the slimline headlights to either side.



■ The wheel/tyre package is colossal. A 22in rim is standard and 23in is optional (with gold spokes if you like). Colour is a big part of the XM, and there is a lot of choice via the 'Individual Special Paints', including back-catalogue icons such as Techno Violet.

Suspension is via double wishbones at the front with a five-link set-up at the back. Presumably in the interests of mechanical transparency, BMW has elected not to use air springs on the XM. Instead the car gets adaptive dampers and steel coil springs. Both derivatives also feature active anti-roll bars (on a dedicated 48V circuit) and rear-axle steering. Note that the steering ratio and contact patch is the same for both models.

Elsewhere, the XM has what BMW describes as a 'second level' of control arms that mean the dampers are almost completely isolated from lateral forces. The camber arms are also aerodynamically optimised (every little helps when you're mitigating for a frontal area like that), and the rear springs are unusually long in terms of rebound travel, supposedly to improve traction and comfort.

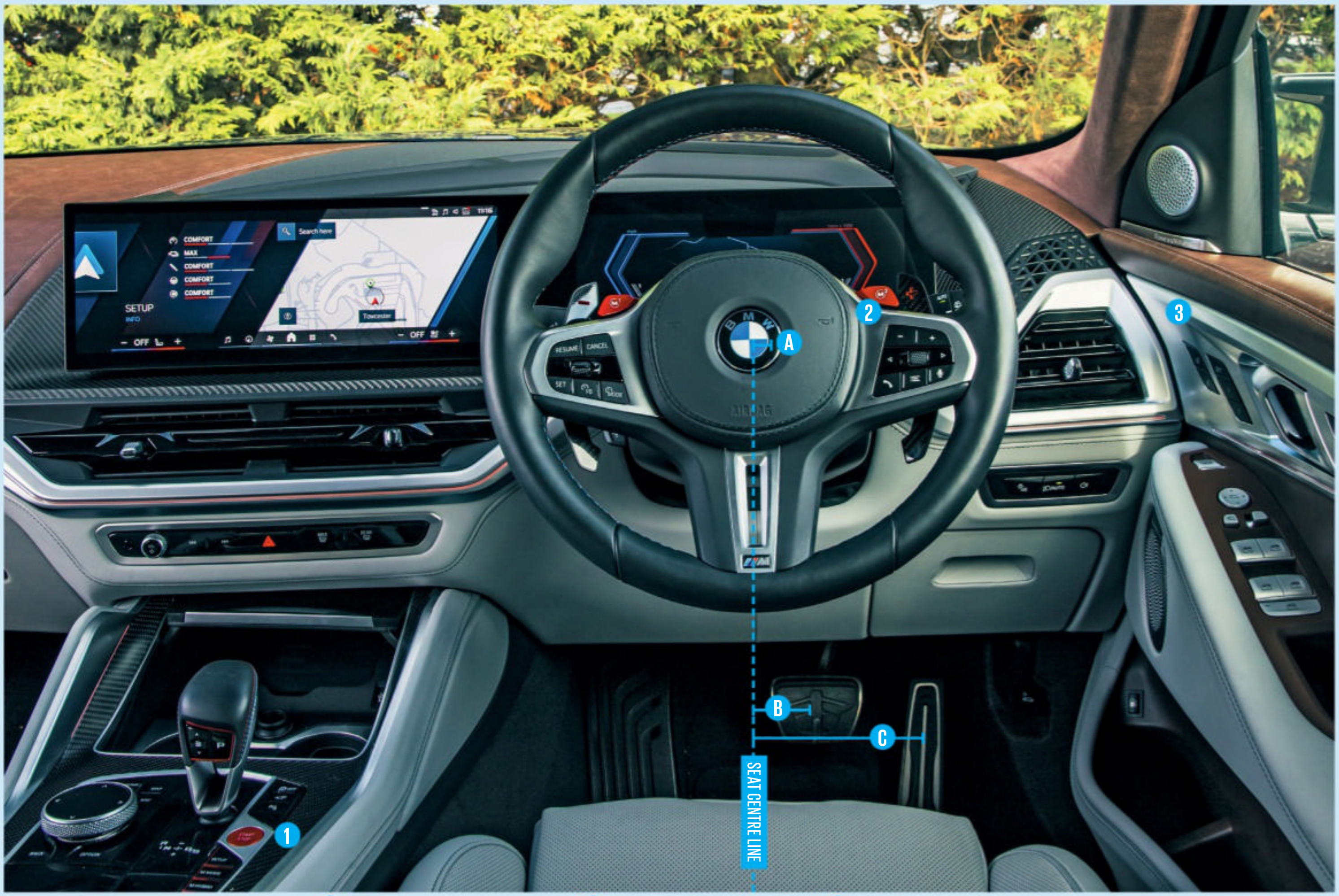
The XM hails from BMW's vast Spartanburg plant in the US, where it takes three workers to feed the car's vast roofliner in through the windscreen aperture. Underpinning the car is the same CLAR architecture used for all of BMW's longitudinally engined models, and for this application it's pushed close to the limits of its adaptability. ▸

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

① Transmission tunnel is neat, with permanent buttons for the powertrain mode, sports exhaust and stability-control mapping, and a shortcut to the myriad of chassis settings.

② This being an M car, you get the M1 and M2 shortcuts mounted to the steering boss. You can program one to put the XM into max attack mode, and the other to go straight to EV mode.

③ BMW calls the finish on the vents and door panels 'Pearl-effect Chrome'. Like so much of the XM's interior, it's a little too 'LA', but there's no questioning the quality of the materials.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 10mm right Ⓑ Brake offset 40mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 160mm right. This is a good driving environment for a car of this ilk, and if the road is smooth you can log considerable mileage without any discomfort. Very commanding view forward.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Sky-high build and materials quality; good ergonomics; the seats
CONS High boot floor; back row is a little enclosed; non-panoramic roof

This is arguably the strongest card the XM plays, despite some caveats.

In 2025 it is obvious this cabin layout hails from a slightly older BMW playbook, but that is no bad thing. Our test car's cool metal trim blended with matt carbonfibre and sumptuous leathers to excellent effect. There is a conspicuous lack of the transparent plastic found on the new M5, and the gearlever – a protuberance BMW now prefers to do without – feels fabulously expensive. Sturdy physical switchgear adorns the door cards, and the matching of the Alcantara-like roof and pillar trim to the dashboard is very neat indeed. In general the atmosphere of the place reminds us of Alpina's historically opulent takes on the 7 Series.

For a full-size SUV, this is also an excellent driving environment, with broad adjustability and the M Multifunctional seats (which can tip forward and back from the shoulder point) that BMW only fits to its most senior performance cars.

It's also good to find that the XM's dashboard is tilted towards the driver, though no more than you would find in an X5 M. Atop it sits BMW's squared-off merger of instrument binnacle and infotainment, though such is the scope of this cabin that the set-up doesn't feel overbearingly large, as it does in other models. The XM feels like a car, not a tech-fest.

The software is the latest iDrive 8.5. The menus remain a little icon-heavy and there is certainly some style over substance in the home screen, but there's no shortage of information and the wireless smartphone mirroring is crisp and responsive. The phone charging pad does get overly hot, however.

From the driver's perspective, the XM experience is ergonomically correct and has a quality that justifies the price. This is, however, rather a louche environment by typical M standards, particularly with the baseball-glove leather of our test car, and things only get more unexpected in the rear.

It starts with the cushions, which are not especially 'M', even if they do make a real difference to comfort. Neither is the name given to this space: M Lounge. Your typical M5 owner is going to find much of this OTT, but there's no question that the sculptural, wrap-around second row of the XM is a comfy place to be, and the measured knee room of 790mm is better than that of the Range Rover Sport (750mm), if 10mm shy of the Aston Martin DBX. The nightclub vibe continues with the roof. Despite appearance, this is not a cover that retracts to reveal glass. This contoured panel is the event itself, with side lighting that reflects the driving mode. Presumably if the edges glow a livid red, back-row passengers should expect an imminent multi-car overtake.

The boot floor is high on account of the fuel tank and the space needed for the V8 XM's differential housing. However, it's still spacious, with a useful squared-off aperture, and the second-row seats fold flat. One drawback is that there is no underfloor cubby for the charge cable. You get a posh duffel bag.

PERFORMANCE

★★★☆☆

PROS Tractable and objectively quick enough; EV drivability
CONS Not the most polished PHEV calibration; lacks outright punch

This application of the B58 – never before seen action in an M car – is curious not least because BMW has tuned it to sound a bit like the full-bore, twin-turbo S58, though its naturally nasal tone is still recognisable. There is synthesised sound at play for sure, and the unit is oddly meek if you switch off the sport exhaust (on by default).

When we tested the V8 XM in the US, it was extremely quick but prone to driveline shunt during downshifts at lower speeds. We also didn't like the fact that, if you were moving under electric power and provoked the engine into life by pressing the accelerator down far enough, the merging of the two sources wasn't also especially smooth. It all felt a bit unfinished.

The six-cylinder 50e suffers from the same driveline shunt, but is perhaps a little less grumpy in the way it initially blends combustion into electric propulsion. There are, by the way, three modes: Hybrid for a 'smart' blend, Electric for pure EV driving, and eControl to recharge the battery on the move. Beyond this you can select the usual Comfort, Sport and Sport Plus modes, plus two recuperation modes, albeit with no true coasting.

Our test car's 5.0sec 0-60mph is middling for a car of this ilk. The track surface was damp but traction was still essentially flawless, so a sloppy getaway wasn't a factor. That is, in fairness, just as quick as the V8-engined Porsche Cayenne S. However, it's a good second slower than a Range Rover Sport SV. The BMW's 5.4sec 30-70mph time in fourth highlights decent tractability, but most testers felt a bona fide M product looking as pugnacious as the XM does ought to have a little more urgency about it when you really put your foot down. The V8 version delivers this and then some; the 50e notably less so.

The delivery of drive unfolds neatly, at least. Put your foot down at, say, 1600rpm in third and torque from the electric motor instantly spikes before dropping off as the engine hits its stride. The electric motor then returns to its 7000rpm maximum as the engine surges towards its own 6500rpm peak. The delivery is linear, and roll-on response never anything less than gratifyingly sharp, even if upshifts are on the stately side for an M car.

And that's the nub of the problem here. This is a versatile powertrain that, despite some shortcomings, is reasonably easy company and has decent drivability in EV mode. The problem is that it doesn't feel very M. Prospective owners may wonder if the V8 in the similarly priced X7 M60i, which is more characterful and decadently smooth, is a better partner. It's a sentiment sure to be reinforced once you have experienced the XM's road manners, as we will now come to.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★⯪☆☆

PROS Decent balance and traction
CONS Choppy ride; lack of handling elegance; confused M identity

The XM is rather a complicated car to assess in matters of ride and handling. Its fundamental cornering balance is strong, as shown by the fact that on track you can load up the outside suspension on a trailing brake and tease the rear axle out of line with an ease that should be beyond any 4WD super-SUV the wrong side of 2.6 tonnes. There is also integrity – a confident heft – in the well-sped steering, which is recognisably M. The same is mostly true for the body control when you have the dampers in their sportier settings. It is close but not cast-iron, and gives the XM raw agility through transitions that is beyond what its main rivals demonstrate, Cayenne excepted.

But something is off. The attempt to put genuine M5 dynamic DNA into a heavy car with a raised centre of gravity and considerable unsprung masses has gone awry.

You sense it most in the slight stiction and inconsistencies of the steering motion. It's also discernible in the slightly non-linear way that roll is taken up. You're never quite sure just how far, and how fast, the body is going to tilt. It's a subtle quirk and not one that is hugely problematic on the road, but it all feeds into a sense of unease when it comes to driving the XM in committed fashion. Back off a touch and the cohesiveness returns to some extent, but the XM is never what you would call elegant.

In any case, backing off and simply letting the XM flow this way and that comes with its own frustrations. In the UK the car's ride quality isn't in any way satisfactory, even on the smaller, 22in rims. The seats may be superb and the isolation from road roar impressive (not so wind noise from the wing mirrors), but it's all for nought when the suspension is this reactive. It is passably adept at motorway cruising but any imperfection in the road and the XM will seemingly magnify it. It is the same problem M-badged SUVs have shown in the past, notably the X3 M, and more than anything else undermines the case for the XM as a serious luxury performance SUV.

BUYING & OWNING

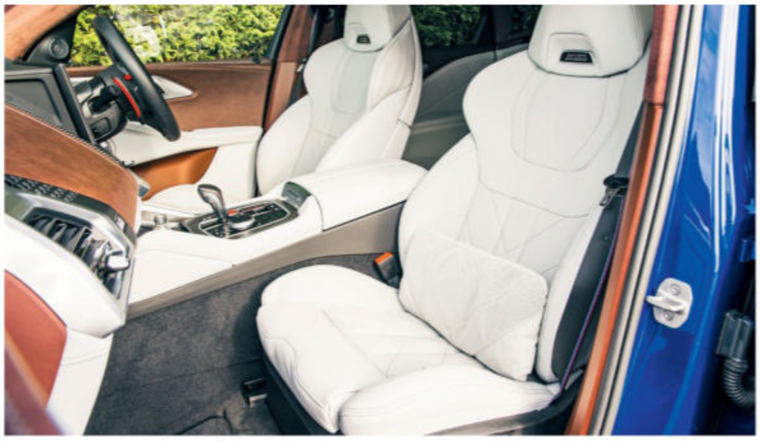
★★★⯪☆

PROS Fair EV range; standard kit list is long; 50e pricing is sensible
CONS Broadly inefficient; has some very impressive rivals at this price

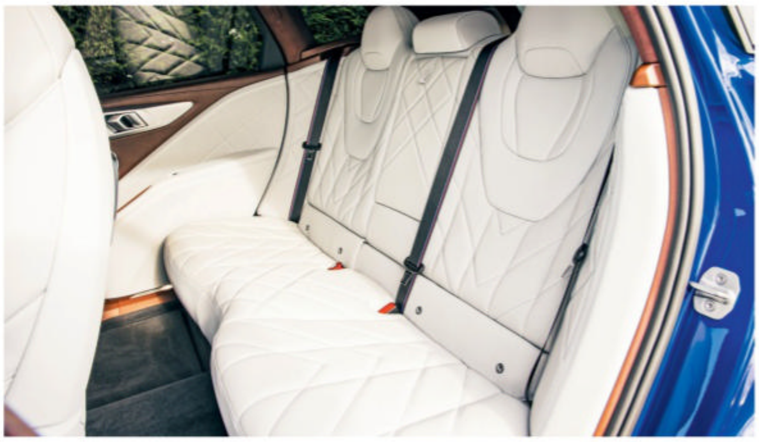
The XM 50e starts at £113k – some £41k less than the V8 version, so if you are buying the XM mostly for its presence and cabin ambience, there's clearly good reason to consider the less bombastic car.

The standard equipment list is also fairly generous, extending to those magnificent seats, soft-close doors, velour floor mats and Comfort Pack, which includes the massage function and heated armrests. Owners looking to enhance the car's extroversion will want to choose a colour from the vast array of 'Individual Special' paints, at a cost of £6055. Opting for 23in wheels will add another £3k.

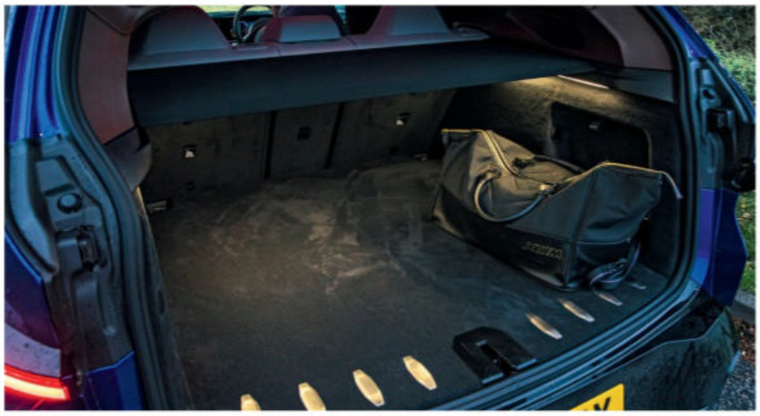
In daily use don't expect much in the way of economy if you're regularly using the engine. Despite being the downsized option, it still manages only 25mpg or so at a cruise. On low-speed routes your economy will depend on how often you can charge the XM (maximum rate 11kW). We averaged 2.2mpkWh in EV mode for a real-world range of 57 miles (WLTP: 52 miles), which is towards the top of what luxury PHEV SUVs currently offer. The Range Rover P550e we tested earlier this year returned 44 miles and the new M5 only 35 miles. ▸



FRONT Leg room 1120mm, head room 1040mm. Steering wheel is slightly offset but not uncomfortably so. Elsewhere, spacious yet also cosseting.



REAR Leg room 790mm, head room 980mm. Passenger space is generous, but glass roof would have made it feel airier, given the rapidly rising beltline.



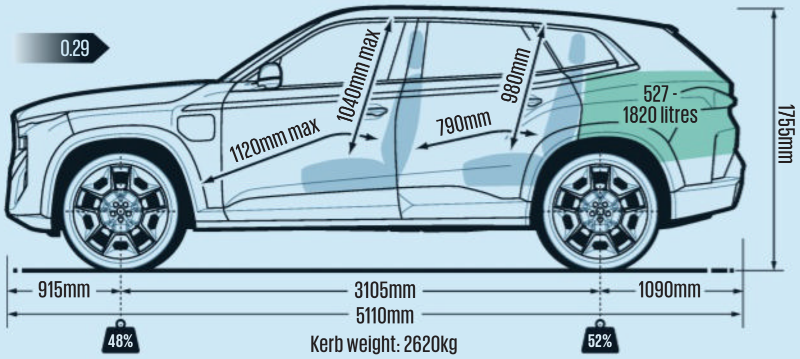
BOOT Length 1150-2050mm, width 1140mm, height 450-700mm. No cubby for cables, just a rather fancy bag. High floor but capacious all the same.

"You're never quite sure how far the body is going to tilt"

TEST RESULTS

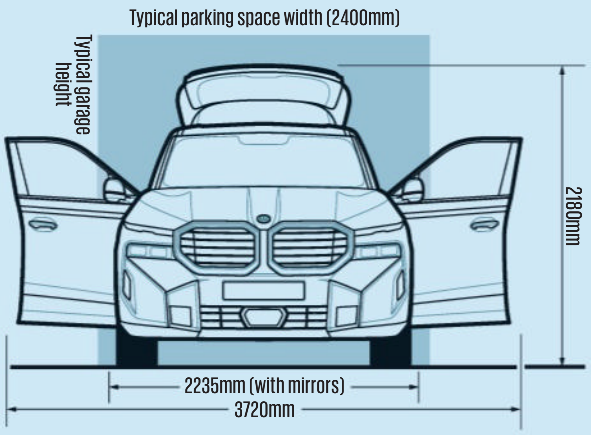
DIMENSIONS

Length 5110mm **Width** 2235mm/2005mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1755mm **Door span** 3720mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2180mm



0.29
1040mm max
980mm
1120mm max
790mm
527 - 1820 litres
1755mm
915mm
3105mm
1090mm
5110mm
48%
Kerb weight: 2620kg
52%

PARKING

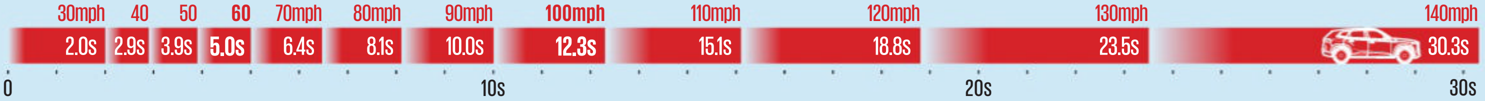


Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2180mm
2235mm (with mirrors)
3720mm

ACCELERATION

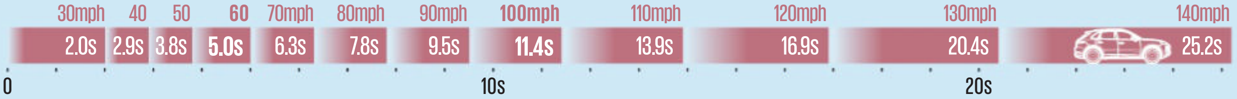
Test conditions 10deg C, damp/wet

Standing quarter mile 13.6sec at 105.0mph **Standing km** 24.8sec at 132.6mph **30-70mph** 4.4sec **30-70mph in fourth** 5.4sec **0-62mph** 5.3sec



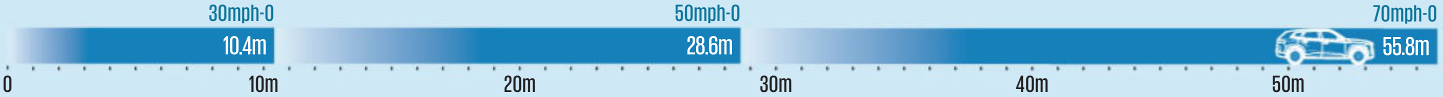
Porsche Cayenne S (2023, 10deg C, wet)

Standing quarter mile 13.4sec at 108.7mph **Standing km** 24.1sec at 138.3mph **30-70mph** 4.3sec **30-70mph in fourth** 6.3sec



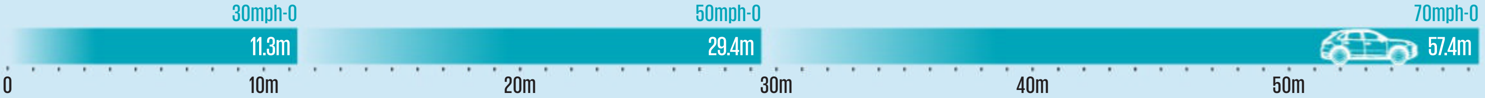
BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 3.23sec (damp/wet)



Porsche Cayenne S (2023, 10deg C, wet)

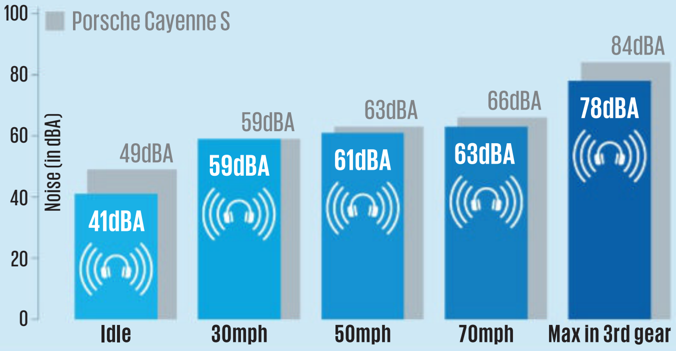
Dry 60-0mph 3.45sec (wet)



ACCELERATION IN GEAR

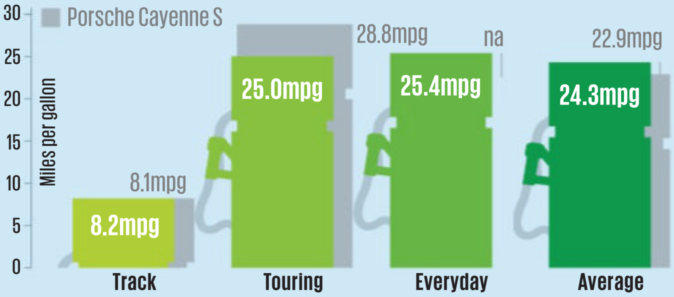
mph	Time (sec) 2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
20-40	1.5	2.1	4.7				
30-50		2.1	2.7	3.4			
40-60		2.2	2.7	3.5	4.6	5.7	
50-70		2.5	2.7	3.6	4.7	5.9	8.3
60-80			2.9	3.7	5.0	6.2	9.0
70-90			3.4	3.8	5.3	6.7	9.8
80-100			5.0	4.1	5.5	7.2	10.9
90-110				4.8	5.9	7.8	12.7
100-120				6.0	6.3	8.8	14.3
110-130				7.9	7.4	9.9	

CABIN NOISE



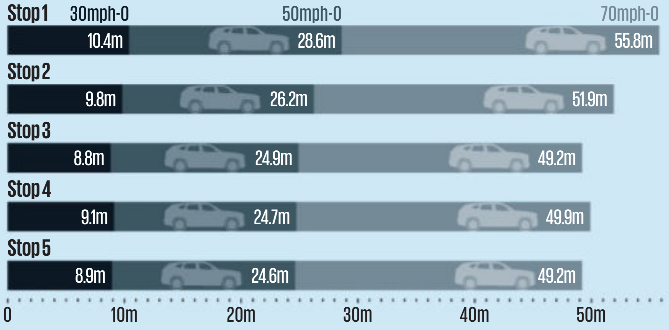
RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 168.0mpg (combined) **Test range** 369/379/386 miles (average/touring/everyday) **Electric test range** 57 miles



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: -6.6m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

BMW XM 50E

On-the-road price £112,820
Price as tested £121,720
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £55,116
Typical PCP £2031 pcm (£6640 deposit with £5570 dealer contribution + 35 months/ 30,000 miles)
Insurance group 50E

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard M Adaptive Suspension Pro, Comfort Access, soft-close doors, M Multifunctional seats, High-Beam assistant, ambient lighting, Comfort Pack Live Cockpit Pro with head-up display, eDrive exterior sound, Connected Package Professional, Iconic Glow kidney grille, Gesture Control **Optional** Marina Bay Blue paint £0, 22in 922 M Bicolour light alloy wheels £1650, Full Silverstone Merino leather £2500, flexible charging cable (Mode 2) £350, Bowers & Wilkins Diamond Surround Sound System £4400

HYBRID POWERTRAIN

Engine Front, longitudinal, 4WD **Type** 6 cyls in line, 2998cc, turbo, petrol; 308bhp at 5000-6500rpm, 332lb ft at 1750-4700rpm **Motor** Permanent magnet synchronous motor, gearbox-mounted; 194bhp, 207lb ft **Battery type** NMC **Capacity** 29.5/25.7kWh (total/usable) **Voltage** 317V **Total power** 469bhp **Total torque** 516lb ft **Power to weight** 179bhp per tonne **Torque to weight** 197lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 8-spd automatic
Ratio spread 5.50-0.64
rpm in top at 70/80mph 1785/2040

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel unitary chassis **Weight/as tested** 2620kg/2639kg **Weight distribution (f/r)** 48%/52% **Drag coefficient** 0.29 **Wheels** 9.5Jx22in (f), 10.5Jx22in (r) **Tyres** 275/40 R22 107Y (f), 315/35 R22 111Y, Pirelli P Zero **Spare** None (mobility kit) **Fuel tank** 69 litres (under boot floor, filler on offside rear wing)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front Double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Steering** EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.7 turns lock to lock; 12.5m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 398mm ventilated discs, six-piston calipers **Rear** 345mm ventilated discs, single-piston floating calipers **Handbrake type** Electronic, automatic

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO_2 100-106g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £169/£338

VERDICT

Succeeds neither as a driver's car nor as a luxury SUV

★★★☆☆

In these tough commercial times, you can't judge BMW too harshly for launching what it has billed as a proper M-devised SUV – not when Porsche, Aston Martin and even Lamborghini are all making hay in the segment. What's less excusable from an operation of this stature is the end result. Even putting the obtuse design aside, in the XM there is little of the dynamic verve that makes an M5 so effective. This is especially true of the 50e variant, which lacks the flagship derivative's hulking V8 powertrain, as well as at least one important piece of chassis hardware. However, this car's core failing is simple ride quality. The XM may work well on glass-smooth roads in Germany and the US, but in the UK it is genuinely challenging to live with. And that is a shame, in light of the car's superb if quirky cabin, and strong EV-running credentials.

TESTERS' NOTES

RICHARD LANE
You wonder how much air springs might have improved the recipe. Perhaps not as much as you'd think. The XM's ride-related maladies aren't about the long-wave gait; they feel a bit more fundamental.

MATT SAUNDERS
The designers have put BMW roundels at the top corners of the rear windscreen, to pay tribute to the M1's quirky dual-badging. It's a bit on the nose, frankly, given what only the second bespoke M car could have been, compared with this strange, poor-selling SUV-flavoured reality.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Overhaul the current approach to ride quality.
- Iron out the driveline inconsistencies.
- Give the option of a panoramic roof.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5	
					BMW XM 50E	
	PORSCHE CAYENNE GTS Lacks the opulence of the XM but has a more intuitive V8 driveline and better manners. Rounded.	**RANGE ROVER SPORT P550E AUTOBIOGRAPHY** Capable, fine-riding, lavish PHEV. Perhaps the XM's main threat in showroom terms.	**AUDI SQ7 TFSI VORPSRUNG** A little flat-footed but the torque-monster V8 is lovely. Rolling refinement is very good too. Likeable.	**MERCEDES GLE 53 4MATIC+ PREMIUM** A car the XM should out-box in several respects – and does. But the GLE also has no big drawbacks.		**CADILLAC ESCALADE V** Handles poorly but it does go toe to toe with the XM for presence, and has a 6.2-litre V8. US-only.
	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★☆	★★★½☆		
Price	£107,600	£114,160	£116,095	£96,540		$170,595 (£130,100)
Power, torque	493bhp, 487lb ft	542bhp, 406lb ft	500bhp, 568lb ft	429bhp, 413lb ft		682bhp, 653lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	4.4sec, 171mph	4.9sec, 150mph	4.1sec, 155mph	5.0sec, 155mph		4.5sec (est), 124mph
CO_2, economy	277g/km, 23.3mpg	17g/km, 376.7mpg	282g/km, 22.8mpg	241g/km, 26.7mpg		na, 13mpg (EPA)

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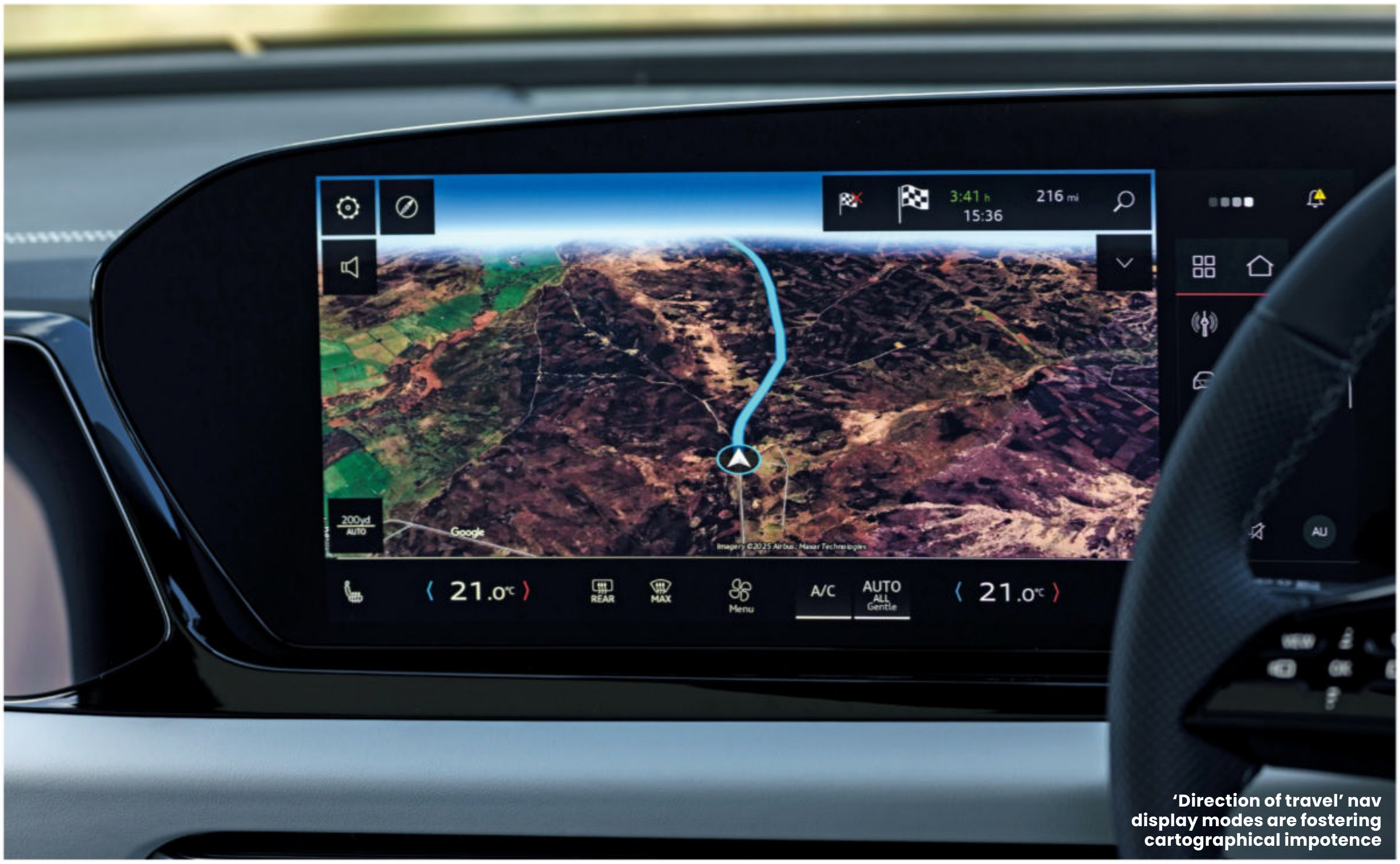
MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing



'Direction of travel' nav display modes are fostering cartographical impotence

It's time, comrades, for the uprising. Time for the overlooked and marginalised to rebalance the scales. We've waited too long already. We must act – and we must do it on behalf of good, right-thinking, sensible drivers everywhere.

The scourge of the god-awful 'direction of travel' satellite navigation display mode has its boot on our throats; it can no longer be borne. It's time to reclaim satellite navigation as a useful tool for those who can read a map. Those who do understand that Naughty Elephants Squirt Water, or they should Never Eat Shredded Wheat. Who do know roughly which way their bonnet is pointing and would simply like a system that makes it possible to keep it moving, and pointing that way, without getting snarled up in tailbacks, roadworks or provincial town centres.

For years, we ignored the threat. It grew quietly on the periphery of things as a novelty, an amusement. It was an extra mode on the 5in screen of your 'Dame Edna' BMW 5 Series or Mk1 Range Rover Sport, that you could show off to passengers, before reverting to the one that, well, you know, made sense.

But then its equally pointless, distracting and cantankerous friend 'bird's eye view' came along – and people seemed to like it. Every aftermarket, sucker-mounted TomTom system, licked-n-sticked inside the windscreen of every Vauxhall Vivaro delivery van, Skoda Fabia school-run regular and Suzuki Baleno hire car had it. Every dad's Christmas stocking had one.

> **"Half of all new cars no longer have a north-up display"**

And simply by sheer weight of numbers, people began to think that that's what satellite navigation was. Some uselessly zoomed-in view of a car on some featureless road, a crudely digitised rendition of what you could see out of the windscreen anyway but with a big blue route super-imposed on top of it that extended into the middle distance, going around corners, junctions and roundabouts and requiring all the mental acuity of a mixed salad to correlate it with the world ahead. Junk food, basically, for your built-in navigating compass that was rapidly taking on the role of cognitive couch potato. It was the beginning of the end for the need of the average driver to take the remotest bit of interest in where they were, which way they're actually heading or which way they needed to go next.

Now look where we are. People are addicted to navigating as if playing some 1990s coin-op video game – and the industry is feeding it. I estimate that as many as half of all the new cars I've tested this year came with factory navigation systems that no longer had a proper, north-up display mode that follows your position on the road and can be zoomed in and out to suit your preference.

Some have 'route overview' modes, which are similar but not quite the same; some let you switch or pivot the map view around to a north-up orientation but, for some reason, stop actually following your position once you have – as if assuming you had seen a funny town name that you wanted to chuckle at for a bit longer (to be fair, Wyre Piddle is quite funny).

As a result, I find I'm using factory navigation in test cars less and less. I know that the Google Maps app on my smartphone works well enough in the way that I prefer, and most test cars let me use it. And right there, in an instant, an entire fitted system, developed and supplied at someone's cost, is dead to me.

Presumably some software developer has decided to take these 'north up' modes out of their offerings, no doubt on the strength of market research that says people don't use them, because they prefer the zoomed-in 'Out Run' modes they've been fed like sweeties. Modes which, incidentally, are about as useful for telling them where they are in the world – and actually helping to avoid traffic jams up ahead when suddenly it becomes obvious that there's a need to – as submarine sonar.

These developers are not drivers; we should not be dictated to by them. And I, for one, refuse to bow down to their 'direction of travel' nonsense, because I'm not nine years old and I don't need to be 'in the map' to know where my roundabout exit is.

All good things...

The 3 Series has set the exec saloon standard for 50 years, from humble E21 to tech-laden G20 – but, asks **RICHARD LANE**, for how much longer?

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

The roll call of cars that were on the scene 50 years ago and which are still being built today is short. It gets shorter still if you stipulate a perfect, unbroken run of production. If you then dismiss those cars whose name has lingered but whose physical form has flitted from one class to another, a mere handful are left to consider. All of them are, at least in automotive terms, household names: Mustang, Golf, S-Class, Land Cruiser, Civic, 911.

BMW is possibly unique in that it contributes to the list twice. The 5 Series arrived in 1972 and the 3 Series came along in 1975 (the 7 Series followed in 1977). The impact of both has been colossal, but it is the junior partner, which turns 50 this year, whose legacy hits hardest. Think 20 million cars sold and a remit spanning from top-tier motorsport to diesel repmobile. There's even been an M-badged track-day estate.

It is a hell of a legacy – one whose start and current end points are sitting on the edge of a field and being photographed by chief snapper Max Edleston. Neither we nor this lovely E21's owners, Thom Williams and Neil Phipps, anticipated what a reflective moment it would turn out to be. Parked up are two cars, one unsullied philosophy, half a century of automotive development and the bookends of a model that melded pedigree handling with practicality better than any other.

So what exactly do we have here? To celebrate the 3 Series' birthday, we sought to bring the current car together with one of its ancestors. Tempting as it was to enlist the 523bhp M3 Competition to represent today's line-up, in the end a 2025-model-year 320i M Sport was selected as the chosen contemporary representative. It's a car that seats four in comfort, will return more than 40mpg at a cruise, costs a little over £40k and will satisfy you on a B-road despite the on-paper meagreness of its 181bhp powertrain. If you ever needed one sensible but rewarding steed to see you through, the 320 is surely it.

Similar thinking unfolded when it came to tracking down an ancestor. BMW UK has a covetable E30 M3 on its books, and we nearly put in a call to score a few days with the homologation special that is widely regarded as the greatest 3 Series that has ever existed. But then, with a little internet digging, I came across this charmingly original E21 320 for sale, in right-hand drive, from 1975. Ground zero, in other words. Never mind the UK market, this is one of the earliest 3 Series to exist, full stop. You can tell as such from the fact that it lacks the plastic panel between the tail-lights. But yes, it is an automatic, and no, this isn't ideal from a driving perspective. But it's a rare opportunity for direct comparison with our G20-generation car. The number of doors aside, we have the same model, same flavour, only a lifetime apart. ▸

Lane reacquaints himself with the simple joys of an E21

The G20 is an agile and composed dynamic exemplar

E21 is soft, but it can be coaxed into rear-axle playfulness in turns

If there is any pathos here it stems from the thought that there may well be no 60th bash for the 3 Series. Next year the critical Neue Klasse i3 arrives as a de facto electric 3 Series. BMW will continue to offer a combustion-engined 3 Series for a while. According to head of design Adrian van Hooydonk, that car – the G20's replacement – will look very similar to the i3, with an appealing Italianate-ness in the silhouette and the kidney grille in its historical, upright form. But let's not pretend this arrangement will last. BMW has no fixed date for the termination of ICE sales, but if you want to buy a showroom-fresh Bavarian junior executive saloon in, say, 2035, you'll probably have one option: an i3 EV.

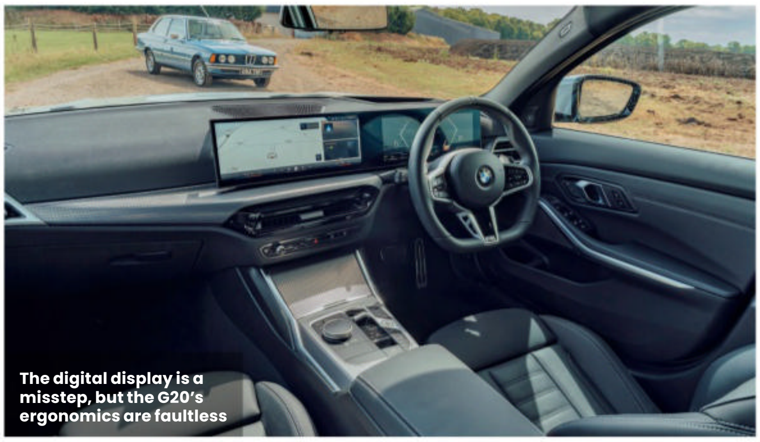
Let's not get ahead of ourselves. The first 3 Series was really just a pretty, shark-nosed shawl, designed by Paul Bracq and thrown over the original Neue Klasse – the saloon that was introduced in the 1960s and credited with saving BMW's independence after it was nearly bought by Daimler. The most famous car in that line-up was the 2002, the fizzing Tii and liveried Turbo versions of which were in essence proto-M cars that presaged the M3 and today are worth enormous money.

BMW spent a serious 35 million Deutschmarks developing the successor to the 02 (still an utter bargain by today's standards, though, at the equivalent of £19m), even though the resulting E21 was mechanically fairly similar. Maturity, quality and big-car feel in a small-car package were the primary goals. Sportiness was less critical at first, although rack-and-pinion steering was a noteworthy development for the 3 Series, even with its slower ratio. All cars got a front anti-roll bar, too.

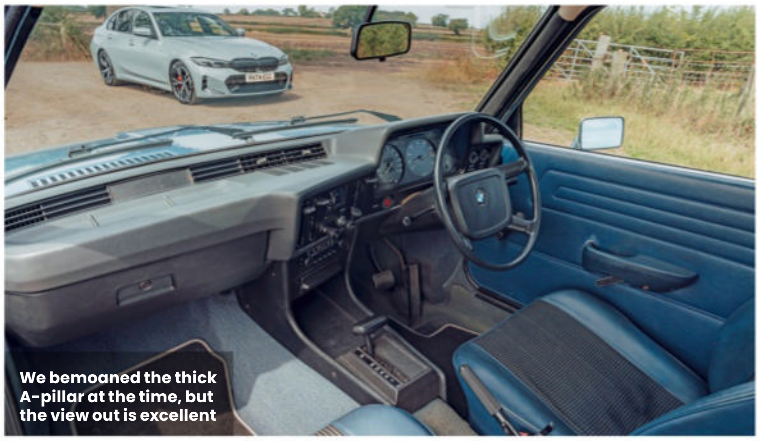
"The handling is genuinely interesting, and this early E21 has traces of the good stuff"

The E21 soon gained power steering, fuel injection and smooth six-cylinder engines, plus optional shorter gearing and a limited-slip diff that made the 323i a delight on a damp road. Spring rates also rose over time as the car morphed into something more driver-centric.

That said, our early carburetted E21 still has the hallmarks of its type: fantastic ergonomics and an easy balance that has you pushing it harder than a 50-year-old deserves. It also feels absurd today that this magazine complained the A-pillars were too chunky compared with those of the 02 – by modern standards visibility out of our cream-headlined E21 is nothing short of liberating. And the instruments really are faultless; sadly, this is something BMW appears to have recently given up trying to achieve. In the main the E21 just feels well engineered, barring



The digital display is a misstep, but the G20's ergonomics are faultless



We bemoaned the thick A-pillar at the time, but the view out is excellent

the awkward clunk as the automatic gearbox slots into the first of only three forward ratios.

It's also a sensationally diddy thing next to the whopper that is the G20, in a way the raw figures simply can't convey. And handsome. When we arrived at the lock-up the car was wearing Alpina-style multi-spoke wheels, but Williams and Phipps set to work swapping it back onto the original 13in steels. They're perfect – as is the little toolkit that presents itself when you open the boot. And the micro-check upholstery and the inspired, heavily angled centre console.

On the road, performance is laid-back. It doesn't quite live up even to the expectation of 109bhp pushing a little over a tonne, which sounds quite promising on paper. In fairness, a lot of this is down to the gearbox, which always seems in a hurry to hole up in its lofty third and final ratio, although the shift quality en route is actually very good. Near-seamless at times, in fact. BMW still turns to ZF today.

The handling is genuinely interesting, though. As we know, the mechanicals of the 3 Series would iterate rapidly in the years following 1975, but even this early car has traces of the good stuff. For one thing, while the suspension is soft, the cornering balance is neutral. What's more, while the trailing-arm rear axle doesn't always feel exceptionally well located, trimming the throttle mid-corner generates a controlled flicker of rotation that is primordial M3-type behaviour. It's an old softy, but one that is mischievous and oh so easy to run along with.

BMW would sell more than 1.3 million versions of the E21, the majority in four-cylinder form. However, it was the E30's arrival in 1982 that marked the point at which the 3 Series started to take off. This era ushered in the option of four-door, convertible and touring bodies. It also introduced diesel to the gene pool, and in 1986 the first M3 wailed into showrooms. E30 production was vast at 2.2 million units, with outputs ranging from 86bhp to 238bhp in the case of the M3 Sport Evolution – a car that pushed pricing to breaking point. At the time, Porsche charged less for a 3.0-litre S2 944. ABS and M styling kits were also newly available to buyers, as was four-wheel drive (BMW even built a handful of 325iX mules with an electrically driven front axle). Turbocharging technically first appeared on the 320i Turbo of 1981, but that was a Group 5 firebreather. The first blown road-going 3 Series was the six-pot E30 324td. ▸

A few of our favourite 3s

E90 M3 GTS

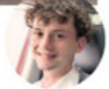
Having a favourite 3 Series is like having a favourite biscuit. There are so many good ones that, depending on your mood, who can say? As I write, a BMW E90 M3 GTS – the orange one with the roll-cage, an incredibly pointy front end, driftable handling and a V8 that revs to the heavens – would work for me, thanks very much. Tomorrow something else. **MP**

E30 325i TOURING

The E30 built on the 3 Series formula of crisp styling and big-engine/small-car feel by adding a dash of usability with more luxury and more doors. It also kick-started the idea of a lifestyle estate: the Touring was a sports saloon with more practicality. Yes, I am contractually obliged to pick the E30 Touring, having just bought one. **IV**

G21 ALPINA D3 S TOURING

Current-model's 350bhp diesel six gives you all the performance you could want. Near-50mpg cruising efficiency, for putting 500-mile brim-to-brim stints in. Faultless ride and refinement. Superb Alpina ride and handling. xDrive four-wheel drive. And it's a Touring, so it's got a boot. Come at me if you like, but I'll brook no argument about it. **MS**



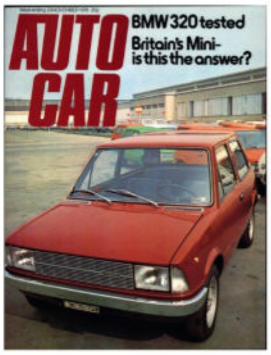
E30 333i

This rare thing was conceived to compete in South Africa's Group 1 racing series. Squishing 3.2 litres of straight-six goodness (engineered by Alpina) into an E30 meant customers had to sacrifice either power steering or air conditioning. The 'Triple Three' was arguably better and cooler than an M3 but was sadly limited to the South African market. **AW**

E30 M3

The BMW GB press relations boss, about four generations back, loved this car so much that when it went out of currency and the bosses wanted him to sell it, for many months he hid it among lesser BMWs on the premises. I remember him demonstrating its (and his own) prowess at power oversteer on a convenient roundabout on the way to lunch. **SC**

What we said in 1975



"There was still something quite audacious in 1968 about putting a 2-litre engine in the BMW 1600. The resulting car, the 2002, was a delight, more so than the majority of the cars then (and since) made by this distinguished manufacturer. The 3 Series range continues the idea of a relatively small car powered by a variety of four-cylinder, single-overhead-cam engines.

"In spite of its extra weight, it is mostly a little quicker than the old car. From a standing start it gets to 50mph in 6.9sec and 60mph in 10.2sec. It does this with great and delightful zest, as its predecessor did, plus a smoothness which remains a standard setter to other makers. It prefers not to have too much demanded of it below 1000rpm, but from 1500rpm it begins to romp away. At around 4500rpm there is a boom, and from 100mph a droning sets in, telling you that you are going fast. Gearchange quality could be improved with a better gearlever knob, although as before it is basically good.

"The old car had a reputation for good handling and acceptable if not unusually high roadholding. You could provoke tail slides with the 2002 with great ease, wet or dry. The same is more or less true of the new car, with perhaps a small improvement in ultimate roadholding, if not quite a match for a Dolomite Sprint.

"Overall, most of us liked the 320 a lot. It has an amiable, eager-to-please character that is Italian rather than German, with the advantage that its German background endows it with a driving position that is better suited to Anglo-Saxon physiques. It should find as keen a public as its predecessor did, drivers who want something nippy yet comfortable."

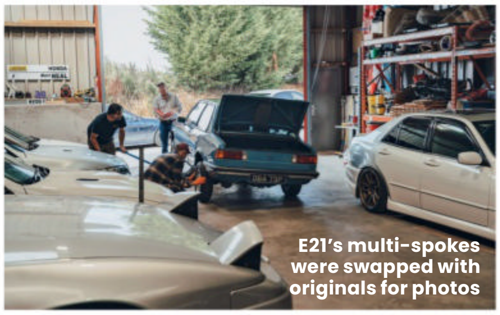
The E30 set the template for the 3 Series we know today. The only material changes to the recipe since then have been the brief adoption of a V8 engine for the E90-generation M3, dual-clutch gearboxes for the following M3 and PHEV technology. The E30 was also the generation that cemented the 3 Series' appeal as a driving tool for anybody. If the M3 was out of reach, models such as the twin-cam 318iS were still phenomenally enjoyable while offering sophisticated road manners. Group test wins became the norm.

However, the best-selling 3 Series of all time was the E46 introduced in 1998, with around 3.3 million sold. On one hand, this was rather an unnecessary refinement of the aerodynamic E36 that had been introduced just six years earlier. On the other, it was an evolution that resulted in the properties of the 3 Series aligning beautifully with the expectations of enthusiasts. You got an upmarket silhouette, a manual gearbox and a strong, soulful six-cylinder engine if you so desired, plus an elegant cockpit and real touring ability. For many, the E46 was the platonic ideal of the performance coupé. It also spawned the M3 CSL. That car's S54 3.2 generated an intake

"Overbearing digital array excepted, the G20 really does have no weaknesses"

E21 is laid-back with an easy, neutral balance; auto shifts are smooth

	BMW 320i M SPORT (G20)	BMW 320 AUTOMATIC (E21)
Price	£42,560	£3549 (in 1975)
Engine	4 cyls in line, 1998cc, turbocharged, petrol	4 cyls in line, 1990cc, petrol
Power	181bhp at 5000-6500rpm	109bhp at 5800rpm
Torque	221lb ft at 1350-4000rpm	115lb ft at 3700rpm
Gearbox	8-spd automatic, RWD	3-spd automatic, RWD
Kerb weight	1525kg	1036kg
0-62mph	7.4sec	12.0sec
Top speed	146mph	106mph
Economy	42.8mpg	25.0mpg
Rivals	Alfa Romeo Giulia, Mercedes C-Class	Triumph Dolomite, Audi 110, Ford Cortina

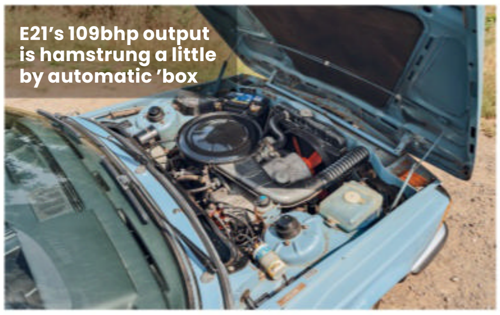

E21's multi-spokes were swapped with originals for photos

MOTOREN WERKE A.G.
München
Außenlack
stellblau
BMW went on to sell 1.3 million E21s before the E30 arrived in '82

Instruments are clear, simple and easy to read

Knobs, sliders and switches on an old-school dashboard

The G20 deploys its modest 181bhp with effective ease


E21's 109bhp output is hamstrung a little by automatic 'box

wail that once heard can never be forgotten. It also had the ability to glamorise what amounted to a cardboard boot floor. Of course, you could also have your E46 as a svelte diesel estate, happy in the knowledge it could carry the dog and also skin its opposite number from Mercedes-Benz or Audi at any time.

After that point crossovers began to creep in, and as the market share of traditional bodystyles was diluted, E90 sales fell to 3.1 million. That car was introduced in 2005 and followed much the same template as its E46 predecessor, but without quite the reverence from fans. Then came the F30, with which BMW generated consternation by turning what had always been the 3 Series coupé into the 4 Series. A decade later, it still doesn't sound quite right, although the car's dynamic appeal undoubtedly took another step forward. This was also the last point at which you could buy a manual, six-cylinder 3 Series in rear-wheel-drive form, courtesy of the 340i. You could even have one on 18in wheels and with untinted glass. Try finding one now.

In its six years on sale, the G20-generation has only just scraped beyond one million sales. The blame again lies mostly with SUVs, but it means there is a distinct possibility the current 3 Series will suffer the ignominy of being the least-loved member of its long-lived family. And talk about an injustice: the current 320i M Sport is arguably the most talented all-rounder on sale today.

With the exception of its overbearing digital array, the G20 really does have no weaknesses. This example looks drab, but its carefully honed dynamism is immediately palpable and lovable. The steering response is alert but matched precisely with the rate that body roll builds. It is half a tonne heavier than the E21 but somehow feels lighter. The ride is taut, but the damping shows a cultured plushness. The downsized turbo engine is responsive and linear and heroically efficient, even without electrical assistance. The ergonomics are spotless. It is comfortable in the back. It has a good-size boot.

It's a wonderful car, in short – one we would never hesitate to recommend. BMW has earned that accolade as a result of spending five decades assiduously honing an unchanging, driver-centric philosophy while carefully adapting to regulation. With the charming E21 and G20 parked beside one another, so different yet the same, you realise what a precious thing the 3 Series has been and still is. So happy anniversary, 3 Series. Whether this is a celebration or a wake, well, time will tell. A

‘WE NEED TO KEEP GROWING’

Seat-Cupra’s new CEO, Markus Haupt, has taken charge of both brands at a crucial time. He tells **JAMES ATTWOOD** his vision

Tindaya is "the maximum we can get out of our DNA"

The character of a car marque often reflects the people leading it. That has certainly been the case with Cupra since it was expanded from a Seat performance badge into its own brand seven years ago.

Cupra's showy, almost brash styling is in tune with the manner of former boss Luca de Meo, who created the brand during his time at the helm of Seat, and his successor, Wayne Griffiths. Both were very different leaders but shared an ability to draw attention, exactly what a new brand such as Cupra needed to make an impact.

Griffiths abruptly departed Seat-Cupra at the start of April, and for the past six months Markus Haupt has held the reins as CEO, initially on an interim basis, stepping up from his role as the firm's production and logistics boss. On first impression, he's a very different leader from his predecessors, not least because his background is in engineering and logistics rather than sales or marketing. But he sounds genuine when he says he's "passionate" about Cupra and his enthusiasm shows when I talk to him.

A German of Spanish descent, Haupt trained in Spain and spent the first 10 years of his career at Seat before moving around Volkswagen Group brands in a variety of roles. He helped to prepare Seat's Martorell plant to build the Audi Q3, led logistics for the group's A0 small car platform, worked on VW's EV projects and ran VW's plant in Spain before rejoining Seat-Cupra in 2022.

"When I returned, I found something completely different," he tells Autocar. "Two brands, lots of success – and the image of Cupra was growing and growing."

Part of the reason for putting Haupt in charge is likely to have been to reduce distractions during an important year for Cupra. The firm has been what Haupt calls "the clear leader" of the Volkswagen Group's critical project to develop £22,000 'urban EVs' on the MEB Entry platform. The Cupra Raval, Skoda Epiq and VW ID Polo and ID Cross will all be built in Barcelona by Seat SA, the parent firm of the Cupra and Seat brands. In total, £8.7 billion has been invested in the project, which, notes Haupt, is "the biggest industrial investment in corporate history in Spain".

Beyond the industrial significance for Seat SA, the urban EV project is huge for Cupra. The Raval will be its seventh and smallest model yet and should help drive volume. Crucially, insists Haupt, the Raval will reflect Cupra's premium performance brief and represent "100% of our DNA. The chassis is lowered, we have sporty suspension and more precise steering."

Growth plans involve both further product line expansion and launching into new markets. Plans to enter the US have been shelved and the focus shifted to the Middle East. "We have lots of feedback from this region from fans, dealers and investors," he says. "The region is growing in terms of finance and it's the logical next step."

The recently revealed Tindaya concept will enter production early next decade as the brand's biggest model yet, sitting on the VW Group's new SSP platform. Haupt describes the radically styled vehicle as "the maximum we can get out of our design DNA" and says a D-segment SUV "is a step we need because it would fit into markets such as the Middle East, Turkey and Mexico.

"We need a portfolio that allows us to be present in different markets. We've launched seven cars in seven years and we need to keep growing. We'll always be exploring if there's room for more, and in the future we'll explore more segments, different cars and new markets."

Although Cupra is growing, the future is less clear for Seat – but Haupt insists the 70-year-old brand still has a bright future and "is the perfect complement to Cupra, addressing completely different customers in different markets. And we are investing in Seat." Updated Ibiza and Arona models are imminent and Haupt says having two brands adds valuable flexibility.

In early September, more than five months after he assumed the interim role, Haupt was named permanent CEO of both Cupra and Seat, with company president Thomas Schäfer – also CEO of Volkswagen – citing Haupt's efforts in readying Martorell to produce the small EVs as making him "the ideal leader" for the firm.

Haupt, for his part, is excited about the future. "We have a wonderful board and team who are engaged and motivated," he says. "Being the leader of this company, together with my team, is an honour for me. My heart feels this company." A

"We've launched seven cars in seven years. We'll explore more segments"

Haupt: "We're investing in Seat." Updated Ibiza and Arona are incoming

De Meo set the Cupra ball rolling seven years ago; Haupt is third CEO

Design revolution

Design boss Diaz: "We have Spanish emotion in our cars"

Cupra's design language has come a long way in seven years. It's hard to spot any common traits between its first model, a lightly reworked Seat Ateca, and the Tindaya concept.

Design chief Jorge Diaz says this is because "constant innovation" is built into Cupra's DNA. "We believe more in revolution than evolution," he says. "We want cars that are like brothers and sisters: they have the same DNA but they are all different to each other. We want to surprise the customer every time we launch a car."

This approach is enabled by the Cupra brand's relative youth. Diaz says: "We don't have heritage, but that makes us free. We can start with a blank piece of paper. But we want to reflect Spanish culture: we're a bit loud and expressive, but actually we show a lot of culture. We have Spanish emotion in our cars."

Keeping it regular

E-Rally is gaining traction as a more relevant form of motorsport. **DAMIEN SMITH** reports

A British Isles crew kept up the best traditions of entente cordiale on the recent FIA e-Rallye Monte-Carlo as they twirled a pretty, French blue Alpine A290 GTS around some of the world's most famous rally stages. Richard Crozier and co-driver Craig Parry joined forces for the first time to dive into the oldest, most prestigious and best-established eco rally, and they emerged with tired smiles, a clutch full of memories and a taste for more.

Remarkably, this was the 30th edition of Monte Carlo's e-Rally, the jewel of the FIA's Bridgestone Eco Rally Cup. A bumper 62 entries lined up, representing 18 nations and 17 car marques, competing over 231km of regularity stages and a total distance of 1078km. Crozier is an 18-year rally veteran and clerk of the course for Britain's round of the series, held in Dundee in July, but Parry is a relative newcomer to motorsport. By day, he's an engineering geologist for AtkinsRéalis, a partner of the Alpine Formula 1 team. It was the link that helped lever the duo into a factory-supported, standard, road-going A290, in Alpine's 70th anniversary year.

RALLYE MONTE-CARLO
2025
BRIDGESTONE
ECO-R
FIA ECO RALLY CUP
eborn
25
HT25 KXH

Regularity rallying is an accessible sport; e-Rally cars are production EVs

“People are driving these stages with an insane level of precision”

E-Rally shares stages and setting with most famous WRC event

Regularity rallying requires a different level of focus and precision

WHAT’S COOL ABOUT GOING STEADY?

Metronome efficiency over outright, spectacular speed? No wonder regularity rallying is considered the poor relation in comparison with the all-out special stage sport. But as Richard Crozier and Craig Parry explain, it’s more appealing than you might think. And it’s also accessible – which isn’t true of too much motorsport.

“I’ve done all forms of rallying,” says Crozier, “and the level of precision in this is so much higher. The Bridgestone Cup is a chance to modernise a sport that has largely catered for historic cars only, so this really opens things up. Its relevance and the opportunity to get manufacturers involved is high, because the cars are the stuff that are on the forecourts.”

“For me, the team sport element appeals,” says Parry. “As a navigator you might think you’ll sit there and get bored, but instead once you are in the zone it’s all-consuming.”

Crozier adds: “When everything is working and you are getting your averages to a tenth of a second on beautiful roads it’s really satisfying. The events are competitive but sociable, too. That’s what’s so appealing.”

For Crozier, the e-Monte offered a fact-finding mission to carry lessons back to his event in Dundee, and for both it also represented a marked step up in competition, in a form of motorsport centred on average rather than outright speed. It’s a skillset that requires a different kind of precision.

“Compared with regularity events I’d done in the UK this was a completely different kettle of fish,” says Parry. “These were my first night stages, on stages such as the famous Col de Turini, which added complexity. Lots of hairpins! Also the average speeds you have to maintain are set higher. On UK events you don’t have to make a huge amount of corrections to keep to your average if your calibrations are good. But here in the hairpins we were lifting rear wheels and tri-podding corners. As the navigator, if Richard takes a shorter line to hold his speed through a corner I have to work out in the moment how many metres we have cut from the driving line. You are trying to recalibrate and do maths while also looking for course marker points. It’s a lot faster, there’s a lot more going on and you have to react much quicker.”

“I call it anxiety rallying,” says Crozier. “There’s a constant tension in the car, because with the GPS they install you don’t know when they are checking your accuracy of performance – maybe 22 to 24 times a stage, but you don’t know whether that’s on the entry, middle or exit of a corner. So you have to be bang on the whole time. Craig pointed out I was breathing heavily… And it’s over four long days, more than 1000km, with long road sections. You have to stay on top of yourself and keep hydrated.”

The regularity scoring is so tight, says Parry. “We were less than a second from our set average on our best stage,” he explains. “In the UK that would be top; it means you had absolutely aced it. But on the Monte you were still coming in 36th with scores like that. People are managing to drive these stages with hairpin bends and still be within 0.1 or 0.2sec on every time control, which is an insane level of precision.”

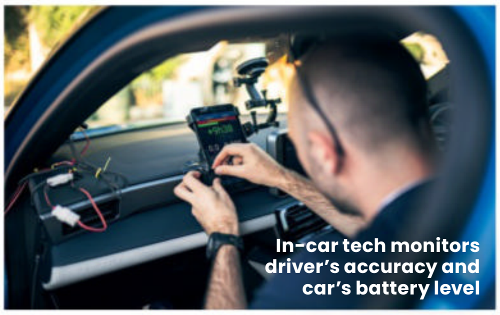
Along with their regularity score, crews are also judged on their economy figures. “At the start of every day your battery level and mileage is checked,” says Parry. “For every stage they check what battery percentage you have got, and there are devices in the car reading that. The people who won the rally somehow managed to be the most economical and best on time, which is insane. Some ignore economy and just try to be best on regularity and be more aggressive.”

So how did they do, in a field that included racing celebrities such as ex-F1 driver Stefano Modena and French rally legend Bruno Saby? The duo finished 47th out of the 62 crews – respectable given their lack of experience together, on the toughest event of its type. They were also frustrated by a penalty that they expected to be rescinded and wasn’t, having stopped in a French village to get some charge – from a charger that then didn’t work…

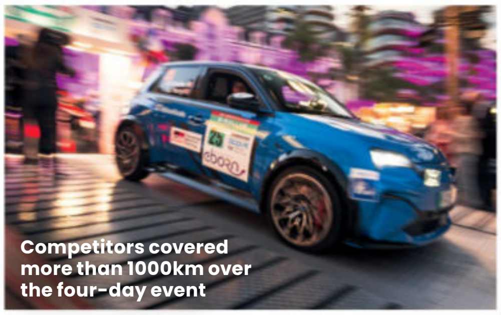
Parry points out that the Swiss crew that finished 47th last year were top-10 contenders this time. So does that mean the pair will return? “I’ve always had a problem with being overly competitive, and if I don’t do well at something I get annoyed and keep doing it until I’m better at it,” answers Parry. “I’m already working out what I need to do better.” **A**

Alpine pairing Crozier (left) and Parry hadn’t rallied together before

25
R. Crozier
C. Parry



In-car tech monitors driver’s accuracy and car’s battery level



Competitors covered more than 1000km over the four-day event

LONG STORY SHORT

Car of the Year jurors gathered recently to whittle this long list of new cars down to a shortlist of seven. **MARK TISSHAW** cuts to the chase

What do the class of 2026 have in common in the new car world? If not too downbeat a hook to draw you into this story: not a great deal of originality. But stick with me.

There were 29 cars from 23 brands at the annual Tannistest in northern Denmark, a test event to help the 59 Car of the Year (COTY) jurors from 23 countries whittle down a longlist of 35 eligible vehicles (some of them weren't represented at the event) to a final shortlist of seven, from which the 2026 COTY will be announced in January. And what the Tannistest field showcased is an industry wrestling with parallel investments in EVs and combustion-engined vehicles and no wiggle room to take a risk on something truly new.

That's not to say the cars weren't any good – quite the opposite. Many are refined, quiet, comfortable and pleasing to drive, even more with good interiors and impressive technology. Perhaps the best example of this quiet competence is the Skoda Elroq: it must be the 100th four-and-a-half-metre-long electric family crossover launched this decade but it's the very best example yet and worthy of its place on the 2026 COTY shortlist.

And 'not a great deal of originality' means there was still some on display. The Fiat Grande Panda is about as conventional as small cars get underneath but it is just so fun and funky and has so much charm on the surface and to drive. It was the first eligible car for the 2026 COTY award I tested back in January and it still feels fresh now despite the familiarity.

Last year, the Grande Panda's platform twin, the Citroën C3, felt quite charming itself on first acquaintance earlier in 2024, only for it to actually feel quite old when it was lined up next to its peers at Tannis. It shows how right Fiat has got it with the Grande Panda, another welcome addition to the shortlist.

The Alpine A390, DS N°8 and Hyundai Ioniq 9 were the other cars at Tannis to have a real freshness and originality about them, albeit with mixed results. The Alpine looks incredible but is not as exciting to drive as it appears. It didn't make the shortlist.

Neither did the DS or the Hyundai. The latter is more deserving than the former because the Ioniq 9 feels so futuristic and is consistently well executed as such a high-quality large car. There's more originality here than any Audi or Mercedes SUV in recent times.

The N°8 just made me feel even more confused about the DS brand. Sure, it's quite original, but really, who is going to buy it in a head to head with almost anything else of a similar size and price? DS feels like it's in a bit of an echo chamber in France. It says its cars sell well

"It showcased an industry wrestling with parallel investments"

there but it needs to get out of Paris to realise the rest of us don't have a clue what it is trying to achieve, and why.

While there was no room for DS on the shortlist, there was for Citroën. The C5 Aircross and I didn't gel: I found it too soft to the point of being uncomfortable and unremarkable in terms of its powertrains. Other jurors clearly disagreed. I liked the interior, the space on offer and its value, so perhaps a go on UK roads might leave a better second impression when I test the shortlisted cars.

The C5 Aircross's platform twin, the Jeep Compass, was another to miss out. The first time that Jeep designed and engineered a car solely in Europe – the 2023 Avenger – it won COTY. But the Compass felt so much more like a car done by the numbers and lacked the Avenger's charm. A shame.

Alongside Skoda, Dacia is one of two shortlisted car makers never to have won COTY. The Bigster is shortlisted, and while I have generally warmed to it and appreciate its significance to the brand, it's hard to love it in the same way you can a Duster. Perhaps that's because the Duster is so firmly established as the brand's centre of gravity and has the best styling. Another one to approach with fresh eyes in final testing.

It was a bit of a surprise to see the Renault 4 on the shortlist. Renault has won COTY on the past two occasions, with the Scenic in 2024 and the 5 in 2025, and while the 4 is another objectively good offering, in COTY's Best Car Launched This Year terms the 4 feels like more of the same from the 5 in a slightly different flavour.

The same could apply to the Kia EV4: lots of objective qualities in isolation but not night-and-day different from the EV3 that was shortlisted last year. As you would have read a few weeks ago, we pitted the EV4 against the Elroq and Nissan Leaf while out in Denmark and the Elroq edged it. Let's see what UK roads bring for the Kia too.

Citroën C5 Aircross convinced many but not Tisshaw (yet)

Test of longlisted cars takes place in Tannis, Denmark

Leaf didn't make the cut, surprisingly; Elroq justifiably did

The Leaf is the one car I was surprised to see fail to make the shortlist. Perhaps it, too, suffers from feeling like such a familiar proposition in such a crowded segment and struggles to stand out with a real primary selling point other than motorway efficiency, but that's a hard thing to really tease out on these test roads.

Efficiency is one of several calling cards for the Mercedes CLA, the final car on the shortlist. This seems a very compelling proposition and strong pretty much everywhere: great powertrain, excellent ride and handling, quiet and comfortable and with a good interior. It feels like a step-change in EVs from Europe and is better almost everywhere than the Tesla Model 3, even in such areas as efficiency, range and charging.

Several other cars made a good impression on me: the BYD Dolphin Surf is a fantastic small car that's the most charming BYD yet; the Firefly is a credible small rear-wheel-drive EV that is Tardis-like inside and genuinely good fun to drive; the Toyota CH-R+ feels like a big advance in drivability over the vanilla bZ4X on which it is based while retaining the rather odd steering wheel with buttons inspired by an old calculator.

Conversely, some cars will stay with me for different reasons. The Zeekr 7X, a largely generic Chinese crossover, had faulty active cruise control and lane keeping that decided it wanted to take me into a field. One to avoid.

The Leapmotor B10 is a more European-friendly car from Stellantis's Chinese brand. It's cheap and feels it to drive.

Thankfully, these were the exceptions in a largely creditable if not overwhelmingly exciting field. Having correctly predicted (but not necessarily voted for) the winner in each of my previous three years as Autocar's COTY representative, this year feels much harder to call. Do I have to? Probably the Mercedes but there might be a bit too much of my own bias at work here.

THE SHORTLIST

Citroën C5 Aircross
Brand's total COTY wins 3
Last win 1990, XM

Dacia Bigster
Brand's total COTY wins 0
Last win na

Fiat Grande Panda
Brand's total COTY wins 9
Last win 2008, 500

Kia EV4
Brand's total COTY wins 1
Last win 2022, EV6

Mercedes-Benz CLA
Brand's total COTY wins 1
Last win 1974, 450SE

Renault 4
Brand's total COTY wins 8
Last win 2025, 5

Skoda Elroq
Brand's total COTY wins 0
Last win na

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

> "Is the M50 good enough to act as the performance X3? Yes"

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 9167**

BMW X3

On the surface it seemed controversial yet the reality was anything but

WHY WE RAN IT To find out if this version is good enough to be the performance X3

I thought I'd like this. But I really, really liked it. And I'm not the only one. The BMW X3 M50 was by far and away the most requested car on the long-term fleet over the past few months and has been all across London, a bit of Derbyshire and the entirety of Wales as well as France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

You'll see just to the right of these words that Sam Phillips became a big fan when he nabbed the keys off me for a week. James Attwood took it on a European road trip with three passengers and was amazed by its ability to swallow luggage and people, all while being just the right size for our roads. Matt Saunders declared it better than a Porsche Macan 4S Electric and Audi SQ5 Sportback, writing: "To drive and enjoy driving, it delivers almost across the board." And during my last report, I put it up against an early Toyota Supra with the same engine. Not really a comparison, of course, but driving them back to back, it struck me that the sports car was not a night-and-day better steer than this SUV with a 570-litre boot and a mahoosive 65-litre fuel tank.

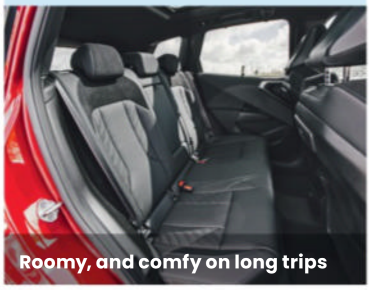
Negatives? It is a touch garish. Especially with the Fire Red paint and black wheels. Its glowing grille, to quote my Gen Z colleagues, is mad cringe. I actually think it probably does offer a useful function of additional daytime-running lights during dusk and dawn, but when going out to the car in the morning, it did make me start up and drive off very quickly in hope my neighbours wouldn't see it.

The interior in general is a mixed bag. I really adore the optional 'Comfort' seats and the view out – and seating position – is spot on for me. It's high up and imperious but doesn't feel like you're driving a truck. But there's a lot in there that annoyed me. The infotainment just has too much to do – I wish the heating controls had some kind of physicality to them. The screen is also a big stretch for the driver. I actually have a build suited to 1960s Italian sports cars (short legs, long arms), but if you were my inverse, you'd really struggle to tap some of the units at the far end of the display on the move. Then there's the reversing camera. It's sharper than a Tom Ford suit and it pops up in the right moments and it has all the angles you could want. But with the standard angle, the lens moves with the steering wheel and it just feels like a static parking space becomes a moving target.

Oh, and the giant piece of plastic

SECOND OPINION

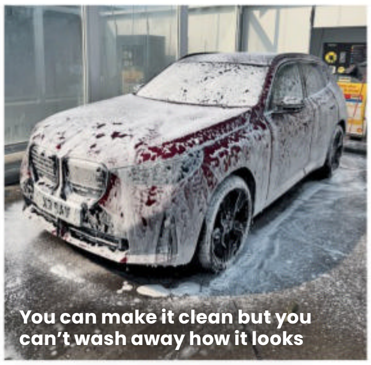
Some of my colleagues were less keen on the X3's looks, but I didn't find them to be too offensive. If your premium-brand SUV must come with dynamism and versatility in equal measure, few can match the M50. That said, your money should go on an M340i Touring if you want a better driver's car. **SP**



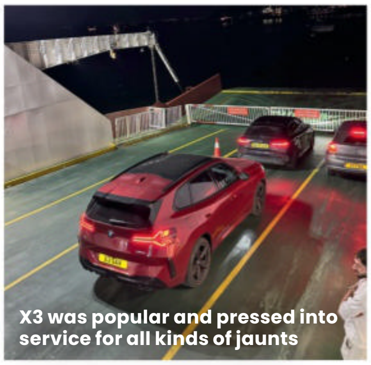
Roomy, and comfy on long trips

On fast roads or slow snaking tracks, it was precise and wieldy

Scullion wanted more switchgear but loved driving it



You can make it clean but you can't wash away how it looks



X3 was popular and pressed into service for all kinds of jaunts

situated at the top of the door card that controls the side ventilation and the door locks is proper naff. It flexes and creeks and moves when you use it. Which I admit I didn't actually do an awful lot. But it is also touch capacitive and the lights for the touch capacitive-ness can become invisible in direct sunlight.

These are pretty minor foibles, though, because this is a truly excellent car. James is completely right about the size. It looks huge when you first see it, but it's actually a bit smaller than the previous-gen X5. In very old car parks, it can still be a bit sketchy but, broadly, parking is fine. I have to parallel park on my street and I never found it a problem. The boot is frankly enormous and the rear seating area (complete with its own climate controls) is also cavernous.

But I was truly blown away by the BMW-ness of it all. The taut body control gives a real sense of connection with the road and it feels natural despite being four-wheel drive and heavy. In fact, the only way it feels a bit digital is in the engine note that gets piped in if you switch to Sport. And that's pretty much the only negative I can come up with about the engine. It is a peach and elevates the driving experience. It's smooth, effortless, torquey in any gear and responsive, it has a wonderful, near-telepathic integration with the gearbox and it is just a joy to use.

It's also monstrously quick. The 4.6sec 0-62mph time is almost a bit of a misnomer. The yardstick of what fast is has been ruined by EVs to the point where 4.6sec doesn't look to be amazing on paper. But it feels very brisk off the line and the M50's mid-range grunt is epic. Overtaking just requires zero effort.

To play devil's advocate for a moment, there's the tricky question of the 3 Series. You can buy one with the same engine for around £7000 less. But the truth is these cars are not answers to the same questions. An M340i saloon just can't handle family life, whereas an X3 can. I'm not blessed with rug rats but my friends are and I am continually shocked by how much stuff accompanies two young children.

Is this M50 good enough to act as the performance X3, seeing as there's no X3 M? The answer is yes. BMW's M division could easily whack in an 'S58' six-cylinder with around 500bhp, stiffen the suspension and put big wheels on it. And while it would be quicker, I just don't think it would spark as much joy for me in the day-to-day.

MURRAY SCULLION

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
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TEST DATA

BMW X3 M50

MILEAGE

At start 4157
At end 9167

PRICES

List price new £64,990
List price now £71,005
Price as tested £75,090

OPTIONS

Technology Pack £2275, panoramic roof £1350, Comfort Plus Pack (rear side window blinds, ventilated front seats, front and rear heated seats) £1350, Driving Assistant Professional £1275, Fire Red paint £875, Comfort Pack (front lumbar support, travel and comfort system, Harman Kardon stereo) £850, Parking Assistant Pro £800, M adaptive suspension £625, Luxury instrument panel £450, heated steering wheel £250

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed economy 36.2mpg
Fuel tank 65 litres
Test average 35.6mpg
Test best 39.1mpg
Test worst 25.2mpg
Real-world range 509 miles

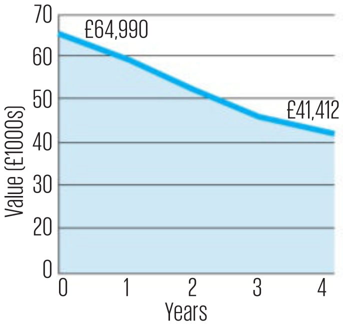
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-62mph 4.6sec
Top speed 155mph
Engine 6 cyls in line, 2998cc, turbocharged, petrol
Max power 393bhp at 5200-6250rpm
Max torque 428lb ft at 1900-4800rpm
Gearbox 8-spd automatic, 4WD
Boot 570 litres
Wheels 21in, alloy
Tyres 255/45 R21 (f), 285/40 R21 (r)
Kerb weight 1980kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate £796.04 pcm
CO_2 177g/km
Service costs None
Other costs £5.99 (screenwash)
Fuel costs £861.98
Running costs including fuel £867.97
Cost per mile 17 pence
Faults None

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

3 Sep, 10 Sep, 17 Sep, 1 Oct, 15 Oct, 22 Oct, 5 Nov

LOVE IT

DELECTABLE ENGINE
The 'B58' really turns a good car into a great one. Torquey, fast, refined and even surprisingly economical.

BOOST MODE
I actually like pootling around in Eco mode. And a pull of this paddle takes you into full-on warp speed mode for 10sec.

DAY-TO-DAY UTILITY
For all this car's performance, it's still an X3. So it has great seats, a big boot and huge fuel tank that enables 500 miles between fills.

LOATHE IT

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY
£75k for an X3 that is not even a full-fat M model is kind of nuts, even allowing for inflation, lots of kit and an expensive engine.

BLUNTED SOUNDSCAPE
A week with a B58-engined Toyota Supra reminded me that this engine is capable of a much richer sound than in this X3.

Low beam is good, full beam with £695 driving lights brilliant

MORGAN SUPER 3

As the nights draw in and rain gets colder, it's time to… keep on driving

MILEAGE 2350
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT Because it might just be the most fun car you can drive at any speed

How wet do you get when a Morgan Super 3 gets wet? It's a situation with which I'm becoming increasingly familiar.

That the nights have drawn in, my gutters are overflowing and the garden is soggy can mean only two things: it's officially late autumn and I've still got a hosepipe ban.

This is the time of year when people tuck away classic cars for the winter and, if I ever untucked mine in summer, I suppose I would too. My motorbike will be mostly looking at the inside of a tarpaulin until spring. But the Morgan is still sitting outside – until they come and take it back soon, boo hiss – and in regular use.

First things first on that front, then. I've said it before but I'll say it again: the tonneau cover is spectacularly good at keeping water out of the cabin when parked. I don't think I've ever tried another that's so watertight, although I'm sure the upturned hull-shaped body helps. The tallest point of the Super 3 is its middle and it curves downwards from there, so water never pools near the central zip. This is also handy as you unbutton it because there isn't a puddle that will pour inside the car.

All of the tonneau's fasteners are, well, I don't know quite what they're officially called but online they seem to be sold as 'Lift The Dot' studs. The tonneau has loosened a little as it ages so it's now easier to do up the fasteners than when the car was brand new, but there's still an order to doing them that works best – because the ones under the wind deflectors are too hard to get to if you leave them until last.

Simple and light, Super 3 feels appropriate here; note ace tonneau

LOTUS
THE CLUBHOUS
VN25 OND

LOVE IT

GRIMEWATCH
The Super 3 looks great clean, but I also like how the aero on it forms patterns in the grime.

LOATHE IT

CHANGING THE GUARD?
I'm torn about the mudguards. These are shorter ones so release more spray than long 'centurion' guards, but they look way better.

You can pull away the driver's side ones to leave the cover half on if you're driving alone, which keeps luggage in the passenger side dry. Half a tonneau open, with some speed up, and in the rain the Super 3 is a bit like a motorbike with a good fairing in that only bits of you get wet. Your head, a right shoulder and bit of arm. I find that windproof gloves are helpful too; my right hand is exposed to a breeze.

Not moving, though, is a different matter. Last week I was stationary for about 30 minutes on the M25 in the rain. And, well, let's say I've been dryer. But the cockpit materials are marine-grade water resistant and, if you wear the right clothes, honestly it's bearable. I love driving a Caterham with the hood up and this isn't that level of cosy, of course. But the heater is great and the heated seats are scorching.

This Super 3 has optional driving lights – the two central LED ones, a £695 extra – which sound expensive, but if you do drive into the autumn or do road trips, I'd recommend them. They come on with the high beam and turn moderately good low-beam lighting into blindingly good white lighting. Living in the sticks where deer graze verges of an evening, I really rate these.

Recently I made an autumnal trip to the Morgan factory to cover the Plus Four's 75th anniversary and, while there, the good people of Morgan had a look over the Super 3 to make sure that, like being a conductor on a ghost train, everything was tickety-boo. They would usually do this free after 1000 miles but I'd driven twice that.

The important stuff was fine but an indicator had worked a bit loose atop the nearside front mudguard, and likewise I'd already had to tighten a couple of Allen bolts that secure those guards. It's a reminder that a Morgan is hand-built and that it's worth keeping an eye on things, although I'm told production processes have become more rigorously controlled recently, to add more integrity to the charm. I'm enjoying the Super 3's sense of both.
MATT PRIOR

TEST DATA

MORGAN SUPER 3
Price new £39,995 **Price as tested** £49,865 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 49.1mpg **Last seen** 29.10.25

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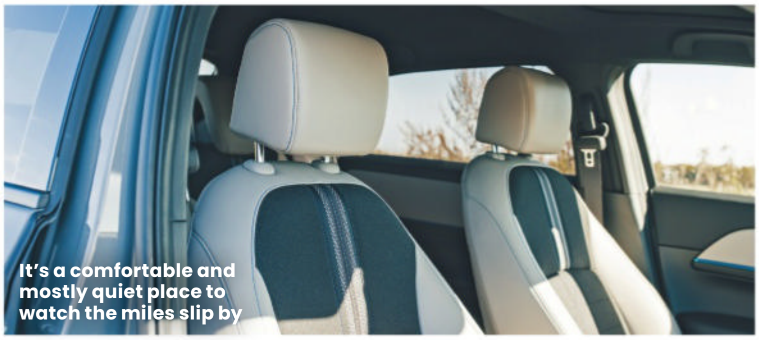
HONDA HR-V

Trunk roads dispatched easily, despite an elephant

MILEAGE 3256
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To check in on a car that we really liked and a brand that has gone rather quiet


It's a comfortable and mostly quiet place to watch the miles slip by

The HR-V has been racking up the miles lately and, by and large, I'm impressed with it as a motorway mile-muncher. But then I'd have been surprised if it wasn't up to the job. I've always been happy enough in small cars on the motorway, so what's the point in something this (relatively) big if it isn't a nice place to watch the world slide by at 70mph?

The cabin is as quiet as you would hope at motorway speeds, with minimal audible intrusion from either the wind or the road. In fact, it feels almost as peaceful to be in as our departing BMW X3 (see p56) – an impressive accolade for a car that's half the price. Being a Honda, nothing rattles and nothing shakes, making it a pleasant place to be.

The ride at higher speeds is great too. It's not bad at low speeds – bumps and potholes are soaked up well even around town – but once you hit the faster roads, it smooths out to a fantastic degree. In a world of paving-slab-stiff rides in modern cars, the HR-V is more akin to a soft pillow.

However, there is an elephant in the room – or, rather, under the bonnet. It's the e-CVT gearbox's fault, really. It seems to change its stepped gears almost at random, revving up the 1.5-litre four-pot in an aurally unpleasant way. As you would imagine, this gets old quite quickly, especially on hillier routes.

Living in South Wales, my drives to work almost always require me to cut around the north or south sides of the Welsh valleys, neither of which is a particularly flat drive from my sea-level home. The south-side route requires a long stint on the M4 over some sizeable hills and the north option means a drive on the freshly rebuilt and absolutely beautiful Heads of the Valleys road – the highest dual carriageway in Wales, peaking at over 400m above sea level.

Whichever route I take, though, the HR-V voices its protest. The noise of the engine tends to sound like someone is undertaking a heavy DIY session a couple of houses away and it is especially noticeable because everything else is so quiet. The curious petrolhead within me is intrigued by the way the car shifts between the gears that its series-parallel hybrid set-up allows it to create, but if I was less interested in such things, it would drive me to distraction.

I find the adaptive cruise control irritating too – though this is something that annoys me in almost everything I drive. When approaching slower-moving traffic, you have to move out what feels like far too early to avoid the car automatically applying the brakes. I've also had a few experiences where the radar appears to have become confused by the clouds of spray that lorries throw up in inclement weather, trying to stop me hitting what the system seems to misidentify as a solid object. Not good.

But in fairness, they're pretty much the only things that irk me about this car in day-to-day use. The driving position is comfortable enough, the seats are superb and little details like the thin steering wheel and relatively small screen make long journeys fly by – all while achieving close to 50mpg.

JACK HARRISON

LOVE IT

LIGHTS DOWN LOW

You don't need to navigate any screens to dim the dashboard – and it can get very dim indeed, which I really appreciate on a night drive.

LOATHE IT

CARPLAY GLITCHES

Apple CarPlay seems to have a fractured relationship with Honda, often being far laggier than it usually is and cutting out audio at random moments for no conceivable reason.

TEST DATA

HONDA HR-V 1.5 i-MMD E:HEV ADVANCE STYLE PLUS

Price new £39,535 **Price as tested** £43,085 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 47.9mpg **Last seen** 5.11.25

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jack.harrison@haymarket.com

SNAPSHOTS

RENAULT 5

Mileage 12,500 **Last seen** 29.10.25
The longer I drive the Renault 5 and clock the approval it draws from most people, the more I also notice that there's a tiny rump of folks determined not to like it, usually because they chose something else. I've tried hard to see their points but only succeeded on one count – rear room. It's a bit tight for a four-metre car. On the other hand, my second son, taller than me at 186cm, can fit for a trip across town. I reckon that's good enough. **SC**

VOLVO EX30

Mileage 5104 **Last seen** 29.10.25
Another software update has fixed another minor bugbear of the EX30. With no 'off' button, you just put the car in park and walk away, and the car shuts down when it detects no key near. But until that point, the stereo has kept playing. Not any more: with this latest update, the music stops just after you exit the car and shut the door. I now feel much less antisocial. **JA**

VW TAYRON

Mileage 2346 **Last seen** 29.10.25
The manual sun shades in the rear have been an early win for the Tayron. My son has high expectations thanks to Autocar's recent Bentley Bentayga long-termer, in which the sun shades were automated. However, he's adapted to the poor man's version (cough). There's a knack to hooking them in place but it's easy once you know how. **RB**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A PORSCHE 718 BOXSTER AND CAYMAN

LAST ORDERS, PLEASE

This end-of-an-era duo could be peak petrol Porsche fun – from £24k

What's the best Porsche ever made? Some will say it's a million-pound hypercar; others will argue for a leggy, 20-year-old 911 with a manual gearbox; and some will even point to one of the SUVs that have kept the company afloat through thick and thin.

They're all strong arguments, but to enjoy that coveted blend of performance, refinement, usability and dependability that Porsche serves up so well, you'd struggle to do better than a 718 – probably the best way you could spend £25,000.

That's the catch-all model name for the fourth-generation Boxster and its coupé sibling, the Cayman (actually on its third generation), which, after 10 years of production, are bowing out to make way for an electric successor (ICE power will live on in some "top versions"). So what better time to join the party?

At its launch in 2016, this generation ('982' in Porsche speak) seemed more evolutionary than revolutionary in relation to its '981' predecessor. After all, the underpinnings and styling shared more than they differed – but a few small changes add up to a lot.

But we'll start with the elephant in the room: the introduction of a four-cylinder engine.

Dishing up 296bhp in 2.0-litre form and 345bhp in the 2.5-litre S, this downsized replacement for the flat six that had powered every previous Boxster and Cayman did not receive a scalding-hot reception.

Performance wasn't the issue, rather that the reasonably interesting Subaru-esque burble on start-up turned into an uninspiring

Both two-seaters are ergonomically spot on and solidly built

What we said then

6 APRIL 2016

"The steering is sweetly stiction-free and beautifully accurate and weighted. The chassis is improved, although it was hardly starting from a bad place to begin with. The ride is deftly controlled and body control is exceptionally tight. That the 718 Boxster achieves this with never a shimmy in the rear-view mirror shows that it has an impressively rigid architecture. The overall handling balance remains spot on too."

drone by the time it reached the rev limit. But we soon got over that and found this to be the recipe for a small, light and engaging sports car polished to perfection.

The GTS appeared in 2018 with 361bhp and some desirable options available on the S (PASM dampers, limited-slip diff and Sport Chrono), but it felt little more than a nicely specced S.

In 2019, a T model arrived to become to the 2.0-litre what the GTS was to the S, more focused and about the best driver's tool this side of a Lotus Elise.

The 2020 GTS was where things got really interesting, though, when Porsche reintroduced flat-six power to the Boxster/Cayman bloodline. This gifted the 718 the sort of blue-blooded, no-compromise grunt that had previously been missing and it won plaudits for combining class-leading dynamics with a soulful engine note and commendable day-to-day utility. As such – other than the GT4 and Spyder versions, which are so exclusive as to merit consideration in isolation from the rest of the line-up – the GTS is the one to have if you can stretch so far.

But you shouldn't turn your nose up at a nicely specified 2.0-litre, which really is all the sports car you'll ever need – so long as you can tolerate the less evocative noise.

All 718s have a great interior: there are plenty of buttons to allow for easy adjustments when pushing on; a refreshingly round, thin-rimmed wheel; a sensibly sized infotainment screen; a mean-looking central rev counter; and an extremely well-constructed vibe.

Complaints are few, but standard kit was stingy, storage limited (despite front and rear boots) and insulation against road noise poor – but anything else offering comparable driver engagement would be more compromised still and less easy to slot into your life. The 718 is a 'proper' sports car that can also be your only car.

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

Whichever you pick, you'll get a sports car you can use every day

> "In 2020, the GTS won plaudits for class-leading dynamics, a soulful engine note and everyday utility"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

MATTHEW TOWNSEND

"I bought a new 2.0-litre Boxster and I'm glad I did: they don't cost much more than they do used and most others are automatic. The car feels very lightweight pushing on, the engine sounds good for a four-cylinder, the gearchange is amazing and it has buttons for everything so I can press them with gloves on when the roof is down in the cold."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ WARRANTY

So far, the 718's reliability record has been nearly impeccable, but nevertheless it's worth taking out a warranty, because parts and labour are very expensive. Porsche Approved Used cars will be sold with one, and are thoroughly checked over prior to sale.

■ BODY

Visibility is poor, the body is low and parking sensors weren't standard. It's a recipe for scrapes and scratches, so check carefully all around, not forgetting the wheels.

■ PARTS

As the 718 ages, suspension, brakes and other components will need to be changed. If you're looking at an older or higher-mileage car, check that it's had crucial consumables changed or that the price takes that into account.

■ ACTIVE ENGINE MOUNTS

They were optional and are the only common failure point so far uncovered. Many owners choose to replace them with polybushed mounts when they fail, because they are roughly £1200 per mount otherwise.

■ WATER PUMPS

They are known to fail, as are thermostats. Both are cheap parts, but the job could run into the thousands if the exhaust needs to be dropped.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

First question: roof or no roof? There are plenty of Boxsters and Caymans around, with the soft-top commanding a slight premium.

When it comes to the gearbox, the seven-speed PDK dual-clutch automatic is comfortably more popular than the six-speed manual, especially in the Boxster, which is rare in 'DIY' spec.

Porsche supplies very little as standard equipment, so leather trimmings, dual-zone climate control, cruise control, PASM, sports exhaust and limited-slip diff to name a few are all desirable to have. They will also help resale prospects later.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£24,000-£38,999

Like all good Porsches, residuals are rock-solid at roughly half the new price a decade on for the cheapest, high-mileage examples. A 2.0-litre Cayman is the lowest-priced route to a 718.

£39,000-£49,999

This is where the bulk of the four-cylinder choice lies. Boxsters cost a little more than Caymans, a GTS isn't necessarily more than a well-specced S and manual cars are similar in price to PDK automatics.

£50,000-£79,999

The desirable 4.0-litre GTS comes into play here. It's worth it if you can stretch this far but a sub-10,000-mile, two-year-old four-cylinder holds obvious appeal.

£80,000-£100,000

The very newest six-cylinder cars from 2024 or 2025. There's a good choice of Boxsters and Caymans and expect prices to hold strong.

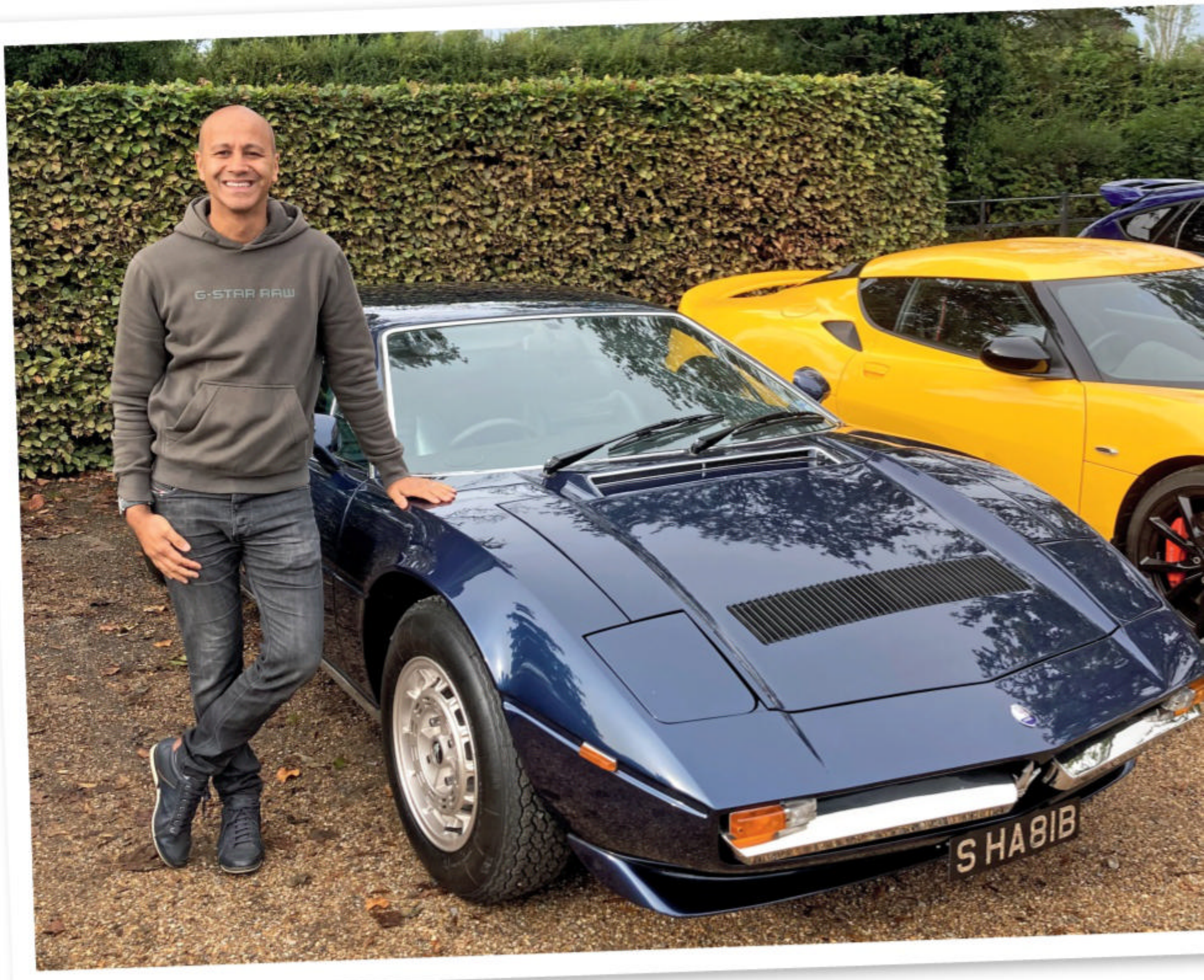
ONE WE FOUND

PORSCHE 718 BOXSTER 4.0 25 YEARS, 2022, 19,500 MILES, £63,500

This is one of 113 examples sold in the UK (1250 worldwide) to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Boxster. With its unique Neodyme wheels and Bordeaux interior, it looks the part and has depreciated only £10,000 since new. Certainly a model to watch for the future, especially if it has a manual gearbox like this one.

My car & I

I'd always wanted a Maserati Merak



"When you're a car enthusiast, you're always looking around for your next purchase." So says Shan Habib, but perhaps not even he could have believed what a corker of a car he eventually stumbled on. "I have a Maserati Gransport and had always wanted a Merak," he says. "Then this came along, advertised in the owners' club..."

'This' is a Maserati Merak SS, sister car of the Bora but with a 3.0-litre V6 engine instead of the Bora's 4.7 V8. Being the sportier SS version, it's 50kg lighter than the standard Merak and has three larger carburettors plus a higher compression ratio, which together boost power from 185bhp to 215bhp.

The shorter V6 engine allowed Maserati to increase the car's cabin space and make it a 2+2. It looks similar to the Bora but has a distinctive pair of buttresses extending from the rear screen to the engine deck. It looks sensational. Shan agrees."I love the shape of the Merak and that the car is so rare," he says. "Maserati made only around 1000 Meraks, split almost evenly between right- and left-hand drive. Including mine, there are only around 30 right-hand-drive Meraks in the UK."

The car was registered in 1977,

Our cars

I knew this was the one when I saw the ad

BY ILLYA VERPRAET

How are you celebrating 50 years of BMW 3 Series? I may have taken it a bit far by buying this E30-generation 325i Touring from 1990. Ever since selling my Porsche 944 four years ago, I've had a hankering to own an old car again. Something simple, light, moderately interesting and, above all, fun.

The E30 ticked the boxes of being a relatively compact car (it's narrower than a current Mini Cooper C) with an interesting engine, rear-wheel drive and a manual gearbox. It strikes that balance of being purer and more mechanical than modern cars but still comfortable and refined enough that you can take it on big trips quite easily.

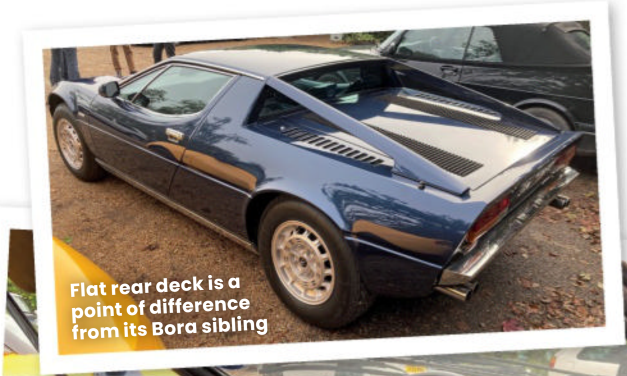
My parents got a 320i when I was two years old, so it was the first car I was really aware of, and my own first car was a 316i Touring too.

When I saw the ad, I immediately knew this was the one. It's a good colour combo and has factory air-con (which doesn't work, yet). It's also a manual car that's had a few choice performance upgrades over the years (a limited-slip diff and Bilstein dampers).

Some people say E30s are really expensive now. Compared with 10 years ago, when you could pick up a 325i for a few thousand pounds, I suppose they are. On the other hand, this very nice example cost me less than a new Renault Clio. Just how nice is something I intend to find out soon by taking it to a classic BMW specialist to try, and hopefully fail, to poke holes in it.

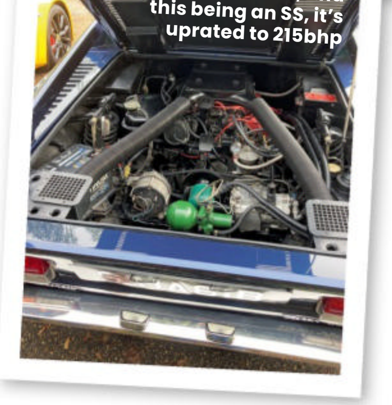
We all hope Verpraet is still smiling after a BMW specialist visit

Newly purchased 325i Touring is an upgraded 1990 car



Flat rear deck is a point of difference from its Bora sibling

Cabin is the car's most original part and smells 'period'



Merak has a V6, and this being an SS, it's uprated to 215bhp

> **"I paid £50,000 for it. I reckon the previous owner's bodyshop bill alone was that much"**

but not long before Merak bought it, it was the subject of a 1000-hour body restoration.

"When I saw it, I didn't think twice. I snapped it up. The body had been restored by Blackline Classic Cars. They did a beautiful job. It's all metal; there's no filler. The body sold me the car because they can be rust buckets. I paid £50,000 for the car. I reckon the bodyshop bill alone was that much," he says.

A couple of years before the body was refurbished, the engine was overhauled when, among other improvements, it was fitted with sodium-filled valves. The suspension and brakes were also treated to a makeover. Really, only the interior of Shan's car is completely original. "It's why you noticed the authentic smell when you opened the door," he laughs.

The Merak's tyres are new but in the original style and remanufactured by Michelin with a modern compound. "Their tall profile helps cushion the ride," says Shan. "In fact, although it's almost 50 years old, the car is very nice to drive. It's not supercar quick but gets away from the lights quickly and sits in motorway traffic at the same speed as everyone else."

The Merak's brakes are power-assisted and use Citroën's hydraulic LHM system. "There's no brake pedal travel," says Shan. "Instead, the pedal feels solid. How hard you push it determines how well the system brakes. It takes getting used to, but once you get it, it's fantastic."

As for reliability, Shan's Merak has barely put a foot wrong. The alternator belt snapped on the way to a show once, and after Shan changed the radio, a bad earth triggered starting problems. "That was easy to diagnose," he says. "The car is quite simple, and with the right tools and some patience, it's possible to fix almost anything."

At least for the time being, Shan and his Merak are joined at the hip. "I think it's a keeper," he says. "Sure, I'd like a Ferrari from the 1970s such as a 512 BB or 365 BB but they're in a different price category altogether!"

JOHN EVANS

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

PORSCHE 911 3.6 CARRERA 4S
2003, 52,000 miles, £28,995
One of the most desirable derivatives of the 996-gen 911. This Seal Grey example has a full service history and a long MOT. The fragile IMS and RMS have both been upgraded, as has the exhaust for an even sweeter engine note.

AUSTIN-HEALEY 3000
1964, 47,000 miles, £59,950
This BJ8 (Mk3) version of the sleek British classic was treated to a full bare-metal, nut and bolt restoration a few years ago. The 2.9-litre inline six was also rebuilt and the entire car is said to be original. The seller says it has been little used in recent years but is in perfect order.

VOLVO V60 T6 POLESTAR
2014, 64,000 miles, £19,750
Here we have 345bhp, 369lb ft and a 0-60mph time of 5.0sec from a turbocharged straight six. This example is Cyan Racing Blue, which makes a slightly unassuming estate look far more eye-catching. It has a full service history and year's MOT.

JAGUAR XE 3.0 V6 S
2015, 97,000 miles, £9500
The XE matches contemporary German rivals for space, pace and refinement. The 335bhp V6 S is the pick of the line-up, and while this example has plenty of miles on the clock, it looks to be in immaculate condition.

Head to head

SAM PHILLIPS

2018 PORSCHE 911 GT3 TOURING

VS

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

1965 CITROEN DS

Brief: Find the dream car you'd buy straight after a lottery win

SP I couldn't track down a Ferrari F50 for sale in the UK, so I'd wait to find the perfect Fezza and buy the best rear-driven sports car of the 2010s instead – a 991.2-generation 911 GT3 Touring. They're Hellishly rare these days. This one costs a smidge under £185,000, but it has covered only 24,000 miles and has a full Porsche history.

AW Not all lottery wins are equal, and knowing my luck it wouldn't be the jackpot. So with my modest winnings, I'd immediately buy an old, large Citroën: this 81,000-mile DS for £35,500. I can think of nothing that'd make me happier (maybe the full EuroMillions).

SP An old, large Citroën? You could have anything you want and you'd buy a wedge of cheese? Good-looking cheese, of course, but you're a handy helmsman. Don't you want something that will stir your senses on a mountain pass?

AW And you could have any car in the world, and it would be a 911? How predictable! Back to the DS, though, because it's my cruiser: I've already got my B-road blaster, and I would bet you'd have more fun in your current Clio Trophy than that very large and very expensive machine in Wales…

SP Urgh, fine. I'll let you take the gong. I should have been more original and picked a Citroën C4 SpaceTourer 1.2 Puretech Flair.

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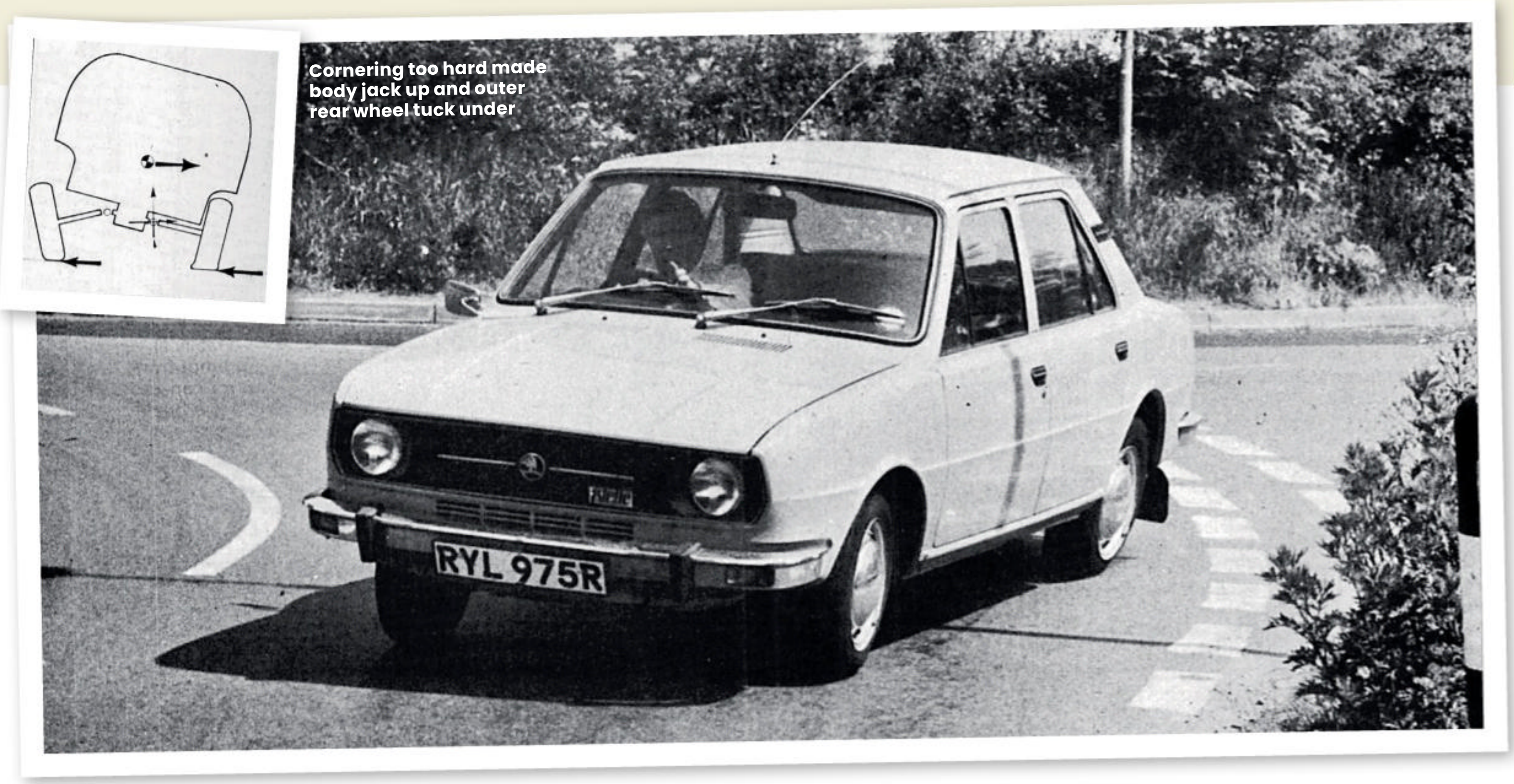

Cornering too hard made body jack up and outer rear wheel tuck under

The dangers of driving a 1970s Skoda

In the Skoda anniversary special supplementing this issue, we mention a rear-engined model of the late 1970s having "dangerous" handling characteristics – and we weren't exaggerating.

Skoda had planned to follow its western European rivals in moving to a front-engined, front-driven format with the replacement for its 100/110 saloon, the essence of which dated back to the 1000MB of 1964. But the Czechoslovakian communist state wouldn't allocate requisite funds, compelling Mladá Boleslav to simply dress its existing old-school chassis in a fresh body.

Autocar tested the 'new' Estelle 120L in August 1977, concluding that it was "not entirely without merit" despite there being "many aspects that are very poor", chief among them its handling.

This would have been quite normal in decades past, certainly to VW Beetle owners, but Western car makers had since moved on to much more sympathetic set-ups. Thus while the Estelle's handling "can be abused and controlled as a hilarious way of going round corners, causing concern for other road users", it required more skill than many drivers had.

So, "we find ourselves facing this question: 'Would you be happy to know that your wife, your daughter, or perhaps even your young sales rep was going to undertake a long motorway journey in it?' Put in the dock this way, we would have to confess to being anything but happy about it, especially if the weather was bad, and the more so if one had doubts about the person's driving ability."

We later explained its flaw in a technical manner: "Swing axles are at their worst when used on driven axles of rear-engined cars, because the effective length of the arm is normally from the sides of the differential to the wheel and there is a lot of body weight to control. With this arrangement, the roll centre of the suspension is above the height of the hubs, and this gives the worst condition for the dreaded 'jack-up'.

Beetle chassis demonstrates the problem

Chevy Corvair became notorious for dangerous handling as early as 1960

"As the car corners, the friction force between the outer tyre and the road pushes inwards at ground level, while the mass of the car is pushing outwards above ground level. The result is the wheel and arm assembly are twisted, lifting the inner pivot and the car upwards. As soon as the body is jacked up a bit, the camber of the outer wheel changes, and if the cornering force is high enough, the wheel will lean outwards so much that it will dig in and the car will just turn over.

"That is bad enough, but the problem is compounded by the fact that there is a lot of camber change inherent with a swing-axle set-up – because the arms are relatively short – and as the camber angle changes, so does the actual cornering power. In other words, if you arrived at a corner with the car level, the cornering performance would be very different than if you arrived with the nose down under heavy braking."

So critical was the press coverage – even the AA piled in – that the UK government's Department of Transport obtained an Estelle for "certain tests". While emphasising that the car didn't breach any legal requirement, it unprecedentedly said it had uncovered shortcomings, chiefly "a tendency to change from progressive understeer to severe oversteer in certain manoeuvres".

Skoda "repudiated any suggestion that the Estelle fell below accepted safety standards" yet applied a host of handling-related modifications to its new 120GLS range-topper, which it also offered as a £150 'handling kit' on lesser models to Britons "who wish to drive particularly hard" – and the DoT said Skoda agreed to alter the spec of all cars exported to the UK from 1 April 1978.

Amusingly, a report from the 1979 International Technical Conference on Experimental Safety Vehicles revealed that the "redesign took place via telephone and teleprinter from a London hotel to a computer in Czechoslovakia". But mercifully it did increase the Estelle's breakaway threshold: testing on a high-friction steering pad revealed it was reached at 0.72g of sideways acceleration in the dry or 0.67g in the wet (induced at about 37mph), up from 0.54g and 0.43g (at about 30mph), "making the transition from neutral to oversteer predictable, slow and as precise as such a simple driveline will permit".

KRIS CULMER

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In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

Our tests are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
ABARTH								
500 Esseesse	★★★★☆	25.3.09	Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo	★★★⯪☆	9.8.23	A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione	★★★⯪☆	26.2.14	Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-
ALFA ROMEO								
Giulia Quadrifoglio	★★★★⯪	29.3.17	Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione	★★★⯪☆	3.1.18	Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio	★★★⯪☆	9.1.19	A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD	★★★★☆	28.6.23	Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-
ALPINE								
A110 Première Edition	★★★★★	16.5.18	Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT	★★★★⯪	9.3.22	The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R	★★★⯪☆	15.11.23	Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-
ARIEL								
Atom 4	★★★★★	9.10.19	Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-
ASTON MARTIN								
Vantage	★★★★⯪	18.9.24	Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera	★★★★★	21.11.18	Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish	★★★★⯪	26.3.25	Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707	★★★★☆	30.11.22	A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-
AUDI								
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition	★★★⯪☆	2.10.19	Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback	★★★⯪☆	18.11.20	Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS3 Sportback Carbon Vorsprung	★★★★☆	9.7.25	Uber-A3 refuses to be defined just by its truly special five-cylinder engine.	3.6	3.3	1619	34.1	-
S5 Launch Edition	★★★★☆	15.1.25	Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 E-Hybrid Launch Edition Quattro	★★★☆☆	1.10.25	Big executive saloon is spec-dependent – and misses its marks here.	5.8	5.2	2197	40.0	52
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition	★★★⯪☆	16.4.25	Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT	★★★★☆	5.2.25	Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	11.7.18	Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	17.6.20	Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.6.19	A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro	★★★⯪☆	2.6.21	A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport	★★★⯪☆	9.11.16	Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic	★★★★☆	20.3.19	More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport	★★★⯪☆	7.7.21	Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line	★★★⯪☆	14.5.25	Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1	★★★⯪☆	2.10.24	EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	12.8.15	Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.10.16	A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line	★★★★☆	26.9.18	Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus	★★★★☆	30.12.15	Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT	★★★★☆	2.4.25	Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262
BENTLEY								
Bentayga W12	★★★★⯪	18.5.16	Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline	★★★★☆	24.4.24	Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed	★★★★☆	22.12.21	Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S	★★★★⯪	19.4.23	Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition	★★★★☆	16.4.25	Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner	★★★★⯪	17.8.22	Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur Speed First Edition	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.	3.2	2.7	2750	26.7	44

BMW

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport	★★★⯪☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★⯪	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★⯪	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★⯪	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5	★★★⯪☆	29.1.25	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★⯪☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
750e xDrive M Sport	★★★★⯪	15.10.25	Look beyond its divisive design for a highly accomplished limousine.	4.8	4.2	2472	35.6	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★⯪☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★⯪☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★⯪☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	9.7.25	Took the luxury EV to new heights in 2022 and nobody has caught up yet. Still great.	4.2	3.3	2637	2.7	314
XM 50e	★★★☆☆	12.11.25	Succeeds neither as a driver's car nor as a luxury SUV.	5.0	4.4	2639	25.0	57
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.25	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Dolphin Surf Boost	★★★★☆	6.8.25	Efficient, well packaged and well priced. Its minor transgressions are forgivable.	12.0	13.0	1385	3.9	173
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★⯪☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279
Sealion 7 Comfort	★★★☆☆	5.11.25	Not quite the swish, advanced, sophisticated EV they would have you believe.	6.5	5.2	-	2.7	272

CATERHAM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160	★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★⯪	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★⯪	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour	★★⯪☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max	★★★⯪☆	30.4.25	Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Hybrid 136 Max	★★★⯪☆	22.10.25	Keenly priced and cleverly packaged – if you order with care.	9.3	8.6	1381	41.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★⯪☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★⯪☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★⯪☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★⯪	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Terramar 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2	★★★★☆	18.6.25	Hottish cousin of the Volkswagen Tiguan is likeable but a bit too sensible.	5.6	5.1	1737	35.0	-
Tavascan V1	★★★☆☆	5.2.25	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	28.4.21	Compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★⯪	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★⯪	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey	★★★★☆	11.6.25	Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.	8.9	7.8	-	47.5	-

DS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★⯪☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★⯪☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★⯪☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★⯪☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB	★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

SF90 Stradale ★★★★☆ 3.11.21
Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.
2.5 1.8 1698 24.4 16

FIAT

500 Twinair Lounge ★★★⯪☆ 24.11.10
Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.
11.7 13.0 1070 42.1 -

500e 42kWh Icon ★★★★☆ 26.1.22
More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.
8.1 7.7 1365 - 142

600e La Prima ★★★⯪☆ 27.3.24
Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.
8.8 7.7 1587 - 173

FORD

Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X ★★★★⯪ 20.2.19
Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.
8.9 7.8 1417 43.8 -

Focus ST ★★★★☆ 11.9.19
Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.
6.1 4.9 1433 40.7 -

Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium ★★★★⯪ 25.3.20
The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.
10.0 9.6 1260 50.0 -

Puma Gen-E Select ★★★★☆ 4.6.25
Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.
7.2 7.2 - 3.4 179

Puma ST ★★★★☆ 24.3.21
Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.
7.2 6.2 1301 41.5 -

Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★⯪☆ 23.10.24
Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.
5.8 4.8 2067 2.9 262

Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★⯪☆ 24.6.20
Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.
- - 1844 - -

Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD ★★★★☆ 23.6.21
Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.
6.8 5.6 2130 - -

Mustang Mach-E GT AWD ★★★☆☆ 27.4.22
Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.
4.2 3.5 2298 - -

Mustang Dark Horse ★★★⯪☆ 20.11.24
Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.
4.5 3.5 1853 26.1 -

Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium ★★★⯪☆ 10.7.24
Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.
10.8 10.6 1426 47.4 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Tourneo Connect 1.5 Ecoboost PHEV Titanium ★★★⯪☆ 2.7.25
PHEV power is a smart choice in this versatile, though expensive, utility MPV.
9.7 9.5 1876 40.3 64

Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆ 8.5.24
Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.
12.1 11.8 1971 38.8 -

Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak ★★★★⯪ 14.6.23
Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.
9.8 9.9 2348 36.6 -

GENESIS

G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★⯪☆ 10.11.21
Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.
7.2 6.7 1751 60.4 -

Electrified G80 ★★★⯪☆ 12.10.22
Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.
4.4 4.0 2349 - 272

GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆ 24.8.22
Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.
3.8 3.1 2192 - 220

GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater ★★★⯪☆ 15.9.21
Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.
6.7 6.6 2217 45.0 -

GWM

Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition ★★⯪☆☆ 1.2.23
Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.
7.7 7.2 1580 - 154

HONDA

E Advance ★★★⯪☆ 26.8.20
More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.
7.9 - 1535 - 110

Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX ★★★⯪☆ 7.10.20
Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.
9.6 10.0 1248 57.0 -

Civic Type R ★★★★☆ 10.9.25
Road-legal touring car vibe perfected. Sensational – if a little serious.
5.4 4.5 1417 37.4 -

HR-V e:HEV Advance Style ★★★⯪☆ 24.11.21
Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.
9.2 9.3 1397 43.2 -

e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆ 1.11.23
EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.
8.6 6.9 1756 - 211

HYUNDAI

i10 1.2 MPi Premium ★★★★☆ 15.4.20
Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.
12.3 12.9 999 52.5 -

Inster 49kWh Long Range 02 ★★★⯪☆ 24.9.25
Dinky looks but a surprisingly grown-up and versatile ownership experience.
9.6 8.8 - 3.3 179

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect ★★★⯪☆ 24.2.21
Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.
9.7 10.1 1065 63.5 -

i20 N ★★★★⯪ 25.8.21
N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.
6.1 5.4 1231 50.6 -

Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★⯪☆ 7.6.23
Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.
7.2 6.2 2006 - 272

Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆ 6.9.23
Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.
10.4 10.3 1352 50.4 -

Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium ★★★★☆ 17.3.21
Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.
7.6 6.2 1612 47.7 -

Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24
A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.
3.5 2.7 2221 - 224

Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium ★★★★☆ 16.10.24
A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.
7.9 7.5 2007 32.9 -

Nexo ★★★⯪☆ 12.6.19
Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.
9.6 9.7 1852 - -

INEOS

Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster ★★★⯪☆ 20.9.23
Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.
8.0 8.1 2682 20.9 -

JAECOO

7 SHS 2WD Luxury ★★⯪☆☆ 9.4.25
Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.
7.3 6.4 1814 35.0 41

JAGUAR

I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★⯪ 12.9.18
Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.
4.5 3.5 2236 - -

F-Pace SVR ★★★★⯪ 24.7.19
Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.
4.1 3.5 2070 29.4 -

F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★⯪ 1.12.21
Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.
5.1 4.6 2264 - 24

F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé ★★★★☆ 29.4.20
The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.
- - 1743 - -

JEEP

Avenger Electric Summit ★★★⯪☆ 24.1.24
Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.
8.3 6.9 1601 - 172

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯪☆ 3.10.18
Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.
11.0 11.5 1540 44.8 -

Compass 4xe S ★★★☆☆ 16.2.22
Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.
6.4 5.7 1872 46.9 22

Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯪☆ 28.10.15
Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.
10.8 11.2 1502 52.6 -

Renegade 4xe Trailhawk ★★★☆☆ 30.6.21
Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.
6.7 5.6 1816 39.4 21

Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland ★★★★☆ 10.4.19
Off-road icon is now more competent on it.
9.0 9.1 2122 37.6 -

KGM

Torres 1.5T K40 AWD ★★⯪☆☆ 4.6.25
Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.
11.3 12.0 1661 35.0 -

KIA

Picanto 1.0 MPI 2 ★★★⯪☆ 11.9.24
No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.
13.4 13.9 985 51.4 -

Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition ★★★⯪☆ 20.11.19
Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.
9.3 8.7 1452 46.8 -

TOP 3

BEST USED ELECTRIC CARS

1 Polestar 2

2 Kia EV6

3 Tesla Model 3

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

2002 JAGUAR S-TYPE 4.2

After the disappointment of the first latter-day S-Type, we were encouraged to note that "revisions are comprehensive, startling even" for this new one. Did they do the trick? You bet. Verdict: "Pop the champagne corks in Coventry. This is the car we've been waiting for."

Price £36,000
Engine V8, 4196cc, petrol
Power 300bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 303lb ft at 4100rpm
Weight 1735kg
0-60mph 6.0sec
0-100mph 15.4sec
Top speed 156mph
Economy 19.9mpg

1987 BMW M3

In the 3 Series' 50-year history, the arrival of the first M3 was a landmark and our road test recognised it as "an historic moment". We called it "a lot of car for the money" and fell for its "remarkable combination of performance, refinement and practicality". Well, you would...

Price £22,750
Engine 4 cyls in line, 2302cc, petrol
Power 200bhp at 6750rpm
Torque 177lb ft at 4750rpm
Weight 1429kg
0-60mph 7.1sec
0-100mph 19.0sec
Top speed 139mph
Economy 20.3mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Soul EV Urban ★★★⯪☆ 5.7.23 Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3 ★★★★☆ 7.9.22 A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line ★★★★☆ 31.12.24 New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it's not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S ★★★⯪☆ 15.6.22 Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S ★★★★☆ 9.10.24 Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT ★★★⯪☆ 4.10.23 Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2 ★★★⯪☆ 20.1.21 Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S ★★★★☆ 31.1.24 Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante ★★★★⯪ 11.10.17 Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD ★★★★⯪ 20.5.20 Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto ★★★★⯪ 4.12.24 New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus ★★★★☆ 3.7.19 Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★⯪ 10.2.21 A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE ★★★★☆ 8.1.20 Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury ★★★★⯪ 12.4.17 A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE ★★★⯪☆ 30.8.17 Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X ★★★★⯪ 13.5.20 World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1 ★★★★⯪ 30.4.25 Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE ★★★★⯪ 2.11.22 Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One ★★★⯪☆ 28.8.24 More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE ★★★★⯪ 13.7.22 A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography ★★★★☆ 9.4.25 A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design ★★★⯪☆ 29.5.24 Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack ★★★★☆ 16.3.22 Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport ★★★⯪☆ 22.3.23 Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi ★★★⯪☆ 6.2.19 Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition ★★★⯪☆ 6.11.24 Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi ★★★☆☆ 7.2.24 MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition ★★★★⯪ 2.4.25 The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT ★★★★☆ 28.5.25 A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R ★★★⯪☆ 24.7.24 There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216
Evija ★★★★☆ 30.7.25 Mind-blowingly fast and intense, with some defining digital inhibitions.	2.8	1.9	1906	2.2	122

MASERATI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grecale Trofeo ★★★⯪☆ 18.10.23 A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante S Granlusso ★★★⯪☆ 8.5.19 Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo ★★★⯪☆ 11.9.24 An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.25 Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo ★★★★☆ 16.10.24 Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav ★★★★☆ 22.4.15 The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport ★★★★☆ 6.11.19 Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech ★★★⯪☆ 10.3.21 Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line ★★★★☆ 19.2.25 Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav ★★★★☆ 28.6.17 Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line ★★★⯪☆ 10.5.23 Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav ★★★★⯪ 2.9.15 An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S ★★★★★ 24.5.17 Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S ★★★★☆ 19.6.24 McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura ★★★★⯪ 19.10.22 Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider ★★★★⯪ 6.11.24 Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17

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*For three weeks from publication date

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

GT ★★★½☆ 27.1.21
Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.
3.3 2.3 1580 34.2

MERCEDES-AMG

A45 S 4Matic+ Plus ★★★★½ 4.3.20
AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.
4.1 3.3 1661 41.5 -

C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate ★★★☆☆ 31.7.24
Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.
3.3 2.8 2217 27.1 7.1

CLE 53 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus ★★★★☆ 20.8.25
Appealing GT leaves something on the table.
3.9 3.5 2012 26.9 -

GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé ★★★★½ 13.3.19
AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.
3.3 2.7 2135 30.1 -

GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé ★★★½☆ 21.6.23
Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.
2.9 2.5 2339 23.9 6

EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition ★★★★☆ 8.6.22
Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.
3.6 2.8 2673 - 259

S63 E Performance Night Edition ★★★★☆ 2.10.24
Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.
3.5 2.7 2666 26.1 -

GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 14.10.20
Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.
5.4 4.9 2471 29.4 -

SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 26.7.23
Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.
3.5 2.8 1939 26.2 -

GT 43 Premium Coupé ★★★★☆ 3.9.25
Less grunt with more grin for less outlay – but a rear-driven GT 55 would be better still.
4.5 3.7 - 36.6 -

GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé ★★★½☆ 14.8.24
Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.
3.1 2.7 1972 30.7 -

MERCEDES-BENZ

A200 AMG Line Executive ★★★★☆ 24.5.23
Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.
7.8 7.3 1396 59.3 -

A250e AMG Line Premium ★★★☆☆ 5.8.20
Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.
6.7 5.4 1665 57.8 -

B180 Sport ★★★★☆ 3.4.19
In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.
8.4 8.3 1405 51.3 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

C300e AMG Line ★★★★½ 4.5.22
Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.
5.8 5.1 2005 49.0 48

E220d AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★☆ 3.1.24
An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.
7.2 5.9 1917 65.8 -

E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus ★★★★½ 19.3.25
Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.
4.9 4.3 2167 46.1 -

EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 4.1.23
Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.
6.0 5.5 2386 - 262

EQS 450+ Business Class ★★★★☆ 7.5.25
Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.
5.9 4.9 2608 2.6 248

EQS 450 Business Class SUV ★★★½☆ 6.3.24
Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.
5.5 5.2 2899 - 265

S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive ★★★★½ 6.4.22
Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.
5.2 4.2 2530 37.0 45

EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★☆☆ 17.11.21
Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.
8.4 7.6 2030 - 200

GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆ 16.9.20
Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.
7.4 7.1 1810 55.4 -

EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆ 18.5.22
A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.
7.7 6.8 2235 - -

GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 13.9.23
Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.
6.5 6.0 1929 41.2 -

GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆ 12.2.20
Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.
6.5 6.0 2634 38.2 -

G350d AMG Line ★★★★☆ 17.7.19
Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.
7.5 7.2 2451 31.3 -

G500 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★☆ 25.9.24
Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.
5.1 4.5 - 30.7 -

G580 with EQ Technology ★★★½☆ 17.9.25
Electric G-Class has no true raison d'être but is still strangely compelling.
4.5 3.9 3140 1.6 209

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé ★★★★☆ 13.11.24
Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.
6.1 5.5 2122 37.1 49

MG

3 Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★½☆ 12.6.24
No bad vices but lacks a final layer of polish.
6.8 6.2 1311 47.9 -

4 EV Long Range SE ★★★★☆ 5.4.23
Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.
7.1 6.1 1692 - 185

S5 EV Long Range Trophy ★★★★☆ 23.7.25
It outstrips expectations for the money, except on range.
6.0 5.1 1723 3.3 217

ZS Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★☆☆ 22.1.25
Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.
7.6 6.6 1422 41.5 -

IM6 100 Long Range ★★★½☆ 29.10.25
Exceptional mixed with bland and irritating.
5.5 4.0 2340 3.0 299

MINI

John Cooper Works ★★★★☆ 14.5.25
A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.
5.8 4.5 1363 42.0 -

Countryman C Exclusive ★★★½☆ 17.4.24
Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.
8.7 7.7 1618 46.9 -

Aceman SE Exclusive ★★★½☆ 8.1.25
Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.
6.8 5.7 1756 3.1 162

MORGAN

Plus Four ★★★½☆ 12.8.20
Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.
5.1 4.3 1013 54.0 -

Supersport ★★★★☆ 6.8.25
Quite plainly the most polished Morgan to date yet still charismatic.
3.8 3.1 1180 44.2 -

Super 3 ★★★★½ 9.11.22
Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.
6.9 5.9 644 43.5 -

NISSAN

Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna ★★★½☆ 29.1.20
Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.
11.9 11.8 1256 46.0 -

Qashqai E-Power Tekna+ ★★★★☆ 8.10.25
Hybrid SUV takes big strides, not least on real-world efficiency.
7.6 6.1 1681 48.8 -

Ariya 87kWh Evolve ★★★½☆ 26.10.22
Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.
8.2 6.4 2109 - -

X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna ★★★★☆ 22.2.23
Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.
6.6 6.0 1947 33.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

OMODA

5 1.6 TGDI Comfort ★★½☆☆ 20.11.24
Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.
7.4 6.3 1474 38.2 -

PEUGEOT

e-208 Allure Premium ★★★★☆ 6.5.20
Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV.
- - 1455 - -

208 1.2 100PS Style ★★★☆☆ 5.11.25
Stylish and efficient, but could be more memorable to drive – and ergonomic.
10.4 10.4 1122 51.3 -

308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT ★★★★☆ 25.5.22
A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.
9.5 9.2 1358 55.3 -

408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 11.10.23
Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.
8.2 7.3 1746 42.1 40

508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto ★★★★☆ 24.10.18
Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.
8.8 8.5 1671 52.0 -

508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 8.7.20
This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.
- - 1720 - -

TOP 3

BEST FIRST CARS

1 Hyundai i10

2 Seat Ibiza

3 Suzuki Swift

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-
e-2008 GT Line	★★★½☆	30.9.20	Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure	★★★½☆	4.8.24	Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT	★★★☆☆	12.2.25	Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-

POLESTAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270	★★★½☆	12.4.23	A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition	★★★★☆	12.2.25	Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235
4 Long Range Single Motor	★★★☆☆	24.9.25	Electric crossover is desirable but something of a missed opportunity.	6.8	5.5	2246	2.5	310

PORSCHE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster	★★★★½	8.6.16	Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S	★★★★½	10.8.16	Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS	★★★★★	14.9.22	A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 Carrera S	★★★★½	3.9.25	Supercar quick but gloriously rounded with it.	3.0	2.5	1600	34.5	-
911 Carrera T	★★★★☆	30.8.23	Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 Carrera GTS	★★★★½	5.3.25	Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.	2.8	2.6	1607	34.3	-
911 Turbo S	★★★★½	10.8.22	Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 GT3 PDK	★★★★½	11.8.21	Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 GT3 RS	★★★★½	22.11.23	Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar	★★★★☆	10.1.24	Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T	★★★★★	3.7.24	Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
Macan Electric	★★★★☆	13.8.25	Well rounded in every sense and not without quietly executed driver appeal.	5.2	4.2	2262	3.0	219
Macan Turbo Electric	★★★½☆	19.2.25	Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	-	2.1	219
Cayenne S	★★★★½	21.2.24	Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo	★★★★☆	5.9.18	As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid	★★★½☆	27.5.20	Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé	★★★★☆	20.7.22	Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid	★★★★☆	22.1.25	Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S	★★★★½	30.10.24	Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

TOP 3

LONGEST-RANGE EVs

1 BMW iX3

2 Mercedes CLA

3 Mercedes EQS

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

RENAULT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic	★★★★½	27.11.19	Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
4 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic	★★★★☆	16.7.25	Charismatic but grown-up, the reborn 4 is a real contender.	8.2	7.5	1493	3.3	182
5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five	★★★★½	12.3.25	Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.	7.7	7.2	1461	3.1	166
Megane E-Tech Techno	★★★½☆	23.11.22	Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC	★★★½☆	18.3.20	Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition	★★★½☆	13.10.21	Eminently sensible but unspectacular.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range	★★★★☆	26.6.24	The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine	★★★½☆	19.7.23	Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost Series II Black Badge	★★★★½	25.6.25	Only flirts with sporting appeal, and gives up no Rolls accomplishments in doing so.	4.5	3.6	2576	25.8	-
Phantom	★★★★★	4.4.18	The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre	★★★★½	20.12.23	Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge	★★★★☆	19.2.20	Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★½	19.7.17	Shows rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR	★★★½☆	2.12.20	Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★☆	15.11.17	Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG	★★★☆☆	25.10.23	Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort	★★★★½	9.2.22	Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG	★★★½☆	31.7.19	Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG	★★★★☆	2.9.20	Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS	★★★★☆	29.1.25	A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	-	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate	★★★★★	17.7.24	The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout	★★★½☆	30.1.19	Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Elroq 85 Edition	★★★★½	19.3.25	Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.	6.1	5.0	2085	3.5	246
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge	★★★★☆	18.8.21	Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium	★★★½☆	8.11.23	Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium	★★★½☆	15.5.24	Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring	★★★½☆	28.2.24	Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring	★★★½☆	27.9.23	A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring	★★★☆☆	15.3.23	A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT	★★★★½	7.4.21	Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive	★★★★☆	27.8.25	Evolution keeps Model Y nicely on the boil – for now.	5.7	4.3	1903	3.2	315
Model S P90D	★★★★⯪	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★⯪☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★⯪☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★⯪☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.	10.3	10.3	2503	30.7	-
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★⯪☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★⯪☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★⯪☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★⯪☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland Hybrid GS	★★★⯪☆	27.8.25	Spacious, functional, efficient and good value, yet neither grand nor lovely.	9.8	9.3	1623	52.2	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★⯪☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★⯪	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★⯪	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★⯪	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★⯪☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★⯪☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★⯪	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
ID 7 GTX Tourer	★★★☆☆	13.8.25	Sporty electric estate is appealing but not the product the GTX brand needs.	5.3	4.6	2353	2.9	241
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★⯪	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★⯪☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★⯪☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★⯪☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★⯪☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★⯪☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★⯪☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★⯪☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★⯪	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 T8 Ultra	★★★⯪☆	15.10.25	Volvo's crowd pleaser is still classy and spacious, though far from cutting edge.	4.6	4.1	2145	34.3	40
XC90 B5 AWD Ultra Bright	★★★⯪☆	2.7.25	Still a mature, versatile and wilfully unspectacular choice.	8.0	7.5	2117	37.0	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★⯪☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Chery Tiggo 9 December
Seven-seat PHEV. Flagship will offer 422bhp and a 91-mile electric range for £43,000.

Kia EV4 GT 2026
Electric 4WD hot hatch from Korea gets about 400bhp and a 0-62mph time of 5.0sec.

Zeekr 9X 2026
A 1395bhp PHEV SUV from a premium Chinese EV maker owned by Geely. Yes, 1395bhp.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
MOTORING HISTORY

BY KRIS CULMER

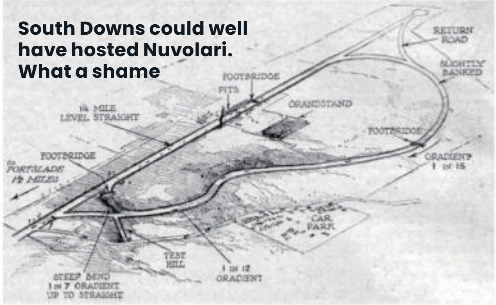
This 1960s beauty is unusual in being born in East Sussex

You might have noticed that this magazine's 'Lost in the archive' page is usually written by me – voluntarily so. The reason is simple: I'm utterly fascinated by history. The intrigue of times past has had me in a chokehold since, well, ever since I can remember.

When Autocar decided to digitise its then 125-year archive in 2020, I naturally flung myself into the project. It was more trouble than we ever imagined, but now we have an invaluable and unique resource for academics and enthusiasts alike: the entire history of the car, documented as it happened, week by week. Not just facts but perspectives, opinions, societal context – things that are simply impossible to reconstruct, due to involuntary hindsight. Stories that haven't yet crossed onto the internet. Best of all, text recognition allows us to track the development of stories across the years with a simple word search, rather than having to painstakingly comb annual indexes, where those even exist.

One of the first things I searched for once we had our digital archive was my hometown – a topic of great interest to me. I can still remember the fascination of being told that my primary school's playing field was once a steam railway – it was a feeling of enlightenment that I experienced once again when Autocar issues of yore revealed yet more lost local attractions.

I knew of Brighton's Speed Trials and the Veteran Car Run, because both still exist. But I had no idea that the Currys shop a short walk from my childhood home in Hove had once been a vehicle works. Thomas Harrington Ltd primarily made buses, but in the 1960s it also turned the Sunbeam Alpine into a kind of mini-Aston Martin that raced at Le Mans. Right there, where I had once glumly traipsed after my dad as he mulled over washing machines.



South Downs could well have hosted Nuvolari. What a shame

> **"Why Portslade never became as famous as Monza is lost to time"**

Likewise, I could scarcely believe that a part of the South Downs where I often walked the family dog had once, almost a century ago, been approved as the site for an international racing circuit – with its own aerodrome attached. Supposedly the project's backers even got as far as initial groundwork, but the exact reasons why Portslade never became as famous as Monza have unfortunately been lost to time.

And Autocar's archive is far from the only fabulous online resource for history buffs. I've learned a massive amount about myself via Ancestry and the British Newspaper Archive – including that a great-great-grandfather of mine was a motor engineer who made the first motorcycle to run in Camberley. Also that he was in his younger years imprisoned for sales fraud, but you have to take the rough with the smooth...

Another favourite digital resource is Britain From Above, a digitised collection of more than a million photographs taken by pioneering aviators between the wars. Scroll around a map to see, in high resolution, how places of personal interest looked in past lives. To compare and contrast is endlessly exciting; take a look at some of the UK's biggest race circuits, for example, and you can track their evolution from pockmarked RAF airfield to glitzy, world-class sporting venue. Or you can see how the UK's road network has transformed over the past century. We moan about traffic on the M25 now, but just look at the spider web of narrow lanes you would have had to use to circumvent London in days gone by.

And if you can't quite place those photos, the National Library of Scotland has a tool that lets you view old maps and current satellite imagery side by side with correlated twin cursors.

So many hours I've lost, so many more I will lose. And as for you? Go forth and discover...

What we did this week

KEI TO MY HEART

Cliché ahoy: car enthusiast goes to Japan, becomes infatuated with kei cars. They're impossible to dislike – and none more so than the Honda N-Van E. It's a taller, longer version of the Super-N that's coming to the UK (driven, p30) – with sliding doors and no B-pillar, so it's endlessly practical. I wasn't laughed out of the room when I asked about export plans, so fingers crossed... **FELIX PAGE**

THE MAGIC NUMBER

I took this 2022 Mazda 3 Skyactiv-X for a test drive with my partner, because it's possibly the best hatchback out there – if outright practicality isn't a priority. The interior leaves an E-Class or 5 Series red-faced and the handling-gearbox combination shames even a Focus. It still looks bang on too. **ALEX WOLSTENHOLME**

STRAIGHT OFF A BROMPTON

In preparation for a planned feature (no, not the Christmas road test), I spent nine hours riding 65 miles on this folding shopping bicycle I'd borrowed. Good news: I'm fit enough. Bad news: the feature has been cancelled. **MATT PRIOR**

4 PINTS
THE NIGHT
BEFORE

One in five drink drive prosecutions happen the morning after[A], many unaware they still have alcohol left in their system from the night before. AlcoSense quickly and accurately tells you your blood alcohol level, so you don't become one of them.

The Telegraph

"a fresh level of accuracy in consumer breath testing"[B]

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